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Technologies of Memory in Early Sasanian Iran: Achaemenid Sites and Sasanian Identity

MATTHEW P. CANEPA

Abstract

This article analyzes the techniques by which the kings of the early Sasanian dynasty engaged the past and shaped the experience of future generations. I concentrate on the innovations and legacy of the first two kings of kings of the dynasty, Ardashir I (r. 224–239/40 C.E.) and his son Shapur I (239/40–270/2 C.E.). These sovereigns fashioned a new and politically useful vision of the past to establish their dynasty's primacy in Persia and the wider Iranian world, eclipsing their Seleucid, Fratarakid, and Arsacid predecessors. I identify and examine the artistic, architectural, and ritual means by which the early Sasanians conformed the built and natural environment of their homeland to their grand new vision of the past. I argue that the Achaemenid patrimony of the province of Pars played an important role in these efforts, serving as inspirations and anchors for the Sasanians' new creations.*

INTRODUCTION

The Sasanian empire (224–642 C.E.) was the last great Iranian empire to rule over Mesopotamia, Iran,

and portions of south and Central Asia before the coming of Islam.¹ Although the Sasanians were a new regime that disturbed the status quo of nearly five centuries of Arsacid rule, they were quick to assert that they were rightful heirs of an ancient line of Iranian kings and heroes. Up to this point, scholarly debates on Sasanian memory have largely centered on textual sources, with archaeological and visual evidence playing a subordinate role. These debates have tended to focus on how well the Sasanians knew the Achaemenid dynasty and whether they wanted to rebuild the Achaemenid empire, one small subset of what I argue is a more complex problem.² Scholarship is largely in agreement that although the early Sasanians counted the Achaemenids as ancestors, they had imperfect knowledge of them and did not set out to recreate the Achaemenid empire.³ While they often praised their ancestors, no Sasanian ever mentions the Achaemenid dynasty in a primary source.⁴ They seem to have under-

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¹The Sasanian empire began in 224 C.E. when Ardashir I overthrew Ardawan IV, his Arsacid overlord (Schippmann 1987, 650). The Arab victory over the Persian army at Niha-vand in 642 and the death of Yazdgerd III in 651 mark the end of the empire and the dynasty, respectively, although Yazdgerd III's son and grandson continued to militate for the restoration of the Sasanian empire from their exile in Tang China (Pulleyblank 1992, 425–26; Compareti 2003; Canepa 2010a).

²Foundational works: Nöldeke 1879, 3 n. 1; Yarshater 1971, 1983. These offered an important corrective to the assumption that had prevailed previously in both centuries (reflected, among other places, in Rawlinson 1876; Ghirshman 1954) that the Sasanians understood the Achaemenids as modern scholarship did and that they sought to resurrect the empire

whole-scale (Shahbazi 2001).

³On the character of the Iranian national history, see Yarshater 1983, 369–70 (for its differing post-Sasanid literary manifestations). For studies that stress discontinuity and loss of memory, see Yarshater 1971; Kettenhofen 1984, 1994; Roaf 1998; Shayegan 1999, 77–157, 201–2; Rubin 2000; Shahbazi 2001; Huyse 2002, 2008. Shayegan (1999) provides a thorough account of the earlier debate. For studies that consider the evidence of an engagement with the past, see Wiesehöfer 1982, 1986; Frye 1984, 293; Winter 1988, 26–44; Gnoli 1991; Wolski 1993; Wiesehöfer 1994b; Daryaei 1995, 2001–2002, 2006, 2009, 2010; Winter and Dignas 2001, 75–84; Harper 2006; Huff 2008; Canepa 2009.

⁴Although Shapur I states, in his Ka'ba-ye Zardosht inscription (ŠKZ) that Pars and Ērānšahr was the land of his ancestors (Middle Persian *ahēnagān*; Greek *progonoi*), where they held property, he did not find it necessary to clarify exactly whom he understood these ancestors to be: "And the [captured soldiers] that came from the kingdom of Rome, from Anērān, we deported to Ērānšahr: to Pars, Pahlaw, Xuzestān and Asūrestān and other lands, where we, [our] father, [our] grandfathers and [our] ancestors held property, [and there] they [were] settled" (ŠKZ 30; Gnoli 1991, 58–9). The lack of specificity in ŠKZ 30, Narseh's Paikuli inscription (NPi B1.03-B3.4.04), and the Persepolis inscriptions of Shapur the King of the Sakas do not prove they lacked knowledge of the Achaemenids (Gnoli 1989, 136–37, 178; Daryaei 1995, 132–33, 140; 2002–2003; 2010; Shayegan 1999, 83–92; Boyce 2001, 127–28).

stood those whom scholarship calls the Achaemenids to be the last scions of the legendary Kayanid dynasty before the invasion of Alexander, although, in this regard, no primary source exists that can attest to an early Sasanian claim of Kayanid ancestry either.⁵ This debate, largely based on textual sources, offered a valuable corrective to earlier notions that the Sasanians consciously sought to resurrect the Achaemenid empire as the Achaemenid empire. It does not, however, offer a useful framework for analyzing the early Sasanians' own understanding of their place in Persian and wider Iranian history nor the close physical proximity and parallels between Sasanian and Achaemenid visual culture, architecture, epigraphy, and ritual.

The line of inquiry I wish to introduce shifts the emphasis to archaeological evidence and the architectural, visual, and ritual techniques by which the early Sasanian dynasty shaped the past.⁶ The last two decades have nurtured a fluorescence of scholarship on cultural memory in the work of historians, art historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. Although none speaks directly to the Late Antique experience, this debate offers some broadly useful insights. The term "site of memory," or *lieu de mémoire*, has become a common critical term to speak about issues of the past, place, and collective memory in such a context.⁷ My use of the term only applies to Late Antique Iran and contrasts with its sense in contemporary discourse where such sites function as symbols of modern societies' alienation from their past. In the Late Antique Iranian world, a site of memory more often than not was the portal to the past and the means by which the kings of kings actively participated in cultural memory (table 1). I argue that the

Table 1. Achaemenid Kings of Kings.

Name	Regnal Dates (B.C.E.)
Cyrus the Great	ca. 558–530
Cambyses	530–522
Bardiya ("Gaumāta")	522
Darius I	521–486
Xerxes I	486–465
Artaxerxes I	465–424
Xerxes II	424–423
Darius II	423–405/4
Artaxerxes II	405/4–359/8
Artaxerxes III	359/8–338
Arses (Artaxerxes IV)	338–336
Darius III	336–330
Bessos (Artaxerxes V)	330–329

Sasanian kings of kings approached the past, could gain control of it, or introduce dramatic changes to it through the natural and built environment of their empire. I refer to these joint practical, artistic, and architectural efforts as technologies of memory whereby certain images, structures, and activities facilitated a vital and compelling experience of the past.⁸ To fully understand the early Sasanians' efforts to come to terms with the past, as archaeologists and art historians, we must widen our conceptual categories to view the interrelation of these elements. I concentrate on the efforts of the first two kings of kings of the Sasanian

⁵The Avesta, the most ancient collection of texts of the Zoroastrian religion, contains the earliest evidence of the Iranian epic tradition, which celebrated the mythical Kayanid dynasty (Avestan *Kauuī*). This epic tradition coalesced in a written form only in the late Sasanian empire as the *Xwadāy-nāmag* and reached its final form in Ferdowsi's *Šāhnāma* (Book of Kings). Although they shared the same home province as the Achaemenids, spoke a descendent of their language, and lived among the ruins of their monuments, the legendary Kayanid kings and heroes eventually became the dominant tradition for the Sasanian dynasty and wider Iranian world. (Yarshater 1971, 1983; Daryaee 1997, 2002, 2010; Huyse 2006, 182–89). The Achaemenids were already influenced by the Avesta and used its concepts to bolster their royal ideology (Lincoln 1996; Skjaervø 2005; Soudavar 2010 [my thanks to the author for providing me a copy before the volume was released]). In this regard, Sasanian interest in the Kayanids can be seen as another mark of continuity rather than rupture.

⁶For the theory of the reciprocal nature of art, architecture, and ritual in late antiquity, see Canepa 2009, 7–21; 2010a.

⁷Halbwachs 1925, 1941, 1992; Foucault 1986; Connerton 1989; Lincoln 1989; Le Goff 1992; Nora 1992; Wood 1994; Ol-

ick 1999; Alcock 2002; Nelson and Olin 2003; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Young 2003. For a critique of anthropological discourse on history and memory, see Radstone 2000; Herzfeld 2001, 55–89. Although directed more at contemporary issues, Kansteiner (2002) presents a useful critique as well. For modern misappropriations of the pre-Islamic heritage for nationalist agendas (both Iranian and Euro-American), see Abdi 2001; Majd 2003.

⁸By using the terms "techniques" or "technologies," I engage both sociological theory that analyzes the means by which memory is recorded and replicated (Olick 1999) and a larger debate that has considered how power shapes culture. These "technologies of power" focus primarily on achieving the subjection of bodies and control of populations, creating the perception that such things as truth, justice, history, and the divine are independently (a priori) existing absolutes (Foucault 1965, 1973, 1977a, 1977b, 1978). In this regard, I focus on the manipulation of the past on the part of those in power rather than a popular "collective memory," another concept that has received a great deal of attention (e.g., Connerton 1989). While Achaemenid-inspired images appear in wider expressions of Sasanian visual culture, such as

dynasty, Ardashir I (r. 224–239/40 C.E.) and his son Shapur I (239/40–270/2 C.E.). These sovereigns innovated a repertoire of early Sasanian memory practices that at once shaped the early Sasanians' experience of the past and inspired the activities of their successors. Reacting in part to the activities of their predecessors and competitors, they modified august Achaemenid ruins such as Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam while creating grand, new Persian monumental zones. In both cases, they cloaked their often radically new visual and ritual innovations with forms and practices carefully drawn from ancient Persian tradition. Their ambitious building campaigns and ritual activities meaningfully connected these ancient sites and their new creations into the living experience of the empire. They were intended to yield a convincing perception to their subjects and vassals of what was an ideologically coherent and useful, though, perhaps to the historian, less than accurate, past.

Iranian history between Alexander and Islam (ca. 331 B.C.E.–642 C.E.) is an extremely challenging period to study because of its fragmentary textual sources and often unprovenanced visual material. I adhere to a hierarchy of sources that I have adapted to include visual and archaeological material (see tables 1–3).⁹ This hierarchy privileges unquestionably contemporary and authentic material—such as well-attributed rock reliefs, inscriptions and seals, and archaeologically excavated structures and artifacts, which form the primary sources—over unprovenanced or post-Sasanian material—such as post-conquest Pahlavi texts or unprovenanced silver plate—which forms the secondary sources. Non-Iranian material, including Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Chinese textual sources and non-Iranian visual material are tertiary.

THE PERSIAN ROOTS OF SASANIAN MEMORY PRACTICES

The Sasanian dynasty had its roots in the province of Pars in southwestern Iran, the homeland of the Achaemenid empire (fig. 1).¹⁰ Although their empire had been defunct for centuries, the ruined palaces, sacred sites, and tombs of the Achaemenid kings of kings still loomed large on the physical and ideological horizons of Pars long after their fall. The vestiges of this great, yet half-understood, Persian heritage confronted all who held power in the province and eventually stimulated the Sasanians' own memorial and monumental practices. The most impressive concentration of visible Achaemenid remains in Pars lay at the western end of the Marv Dasht plain. Here, the plain meets the mountains, and the Polvar River divides the mountains into two spurs, the Hosayn Kuh to the north and the Kuh-e Rahmat to the south. Persepolis' massive platform rose below Kuh-e Rahmat, while, about 6.25 km to the north, the Achaemenids' royal necropolis, called today by its New Persian nickname of Naqsh-e Rostam, marked the final spur of the Hosayn Kuh. Between these two ancient sites grew Staxr, post-Achaemenid Pars' principle city and religious center.¹¹ From at least the early Sasanian period, the inhabitants of Pars conceived of Staxr, Persepolis, and Naqsh-e Rostam as a whole.¹² With their colossal architecture and fine relief sculpture, Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam emerged as objects of special pride and fascination for the post-Achaemenid rulers of Pars and, eventually, became the raw material out of which the Sasanians crafted their early expressions.¹³

While they presented themselves as the true stewards of the ancient Persian sites, the Sasanians' memorial activities owed a great deal to their more proximate predecessors in the region. Indeed, the Sasanians initially drew from, and reacted to, the accumulated Hellenistic, Arsacid, and local post-Achaemenid Persian reinterpretations of the sites. After entering Parsa in 331 B.C.E., Alexander held victory games and a banquet at Persepolis, a celebration that culminated in the destruction of the palace.¹⁴ While, in this instance, Persepolis served as a monument to Hellenic vengeance, other Achaemenid structures retained

in seals and silver (Roaf 1998; Harper 2006), here my focus is discretely the monumental and ritual productions of the Sasanian court.

⁹ Gignoux 1979, 1984; Gyselen 2001; Canepa 2009, xvii–xviii.

¹⁰ The historical province extended beyond the confines of the modern province of Fars (Wiesehöfer 1999). I use the Middle Persian version of the name to refer to the province in late antiquity.

¹¹ New Persian Estakhr; Middle Persian Staxr (*stxl*), meaning “fortress,” reconstructed as Old Persian **pārsa.staxra* (Stronghold of Parsa); cf. Avestan *staxra-* (strong, hard) (Bartholomae 1904, 1591; Herzfeld 1935, 45; Bivar 1997, 643). Staxr lies ca. 2 km southeast of Naqsh-e Rostam and 5 km south-southwest of Persepolis.

¹² Shahbazi 1977, 200–1; Bivar 1997, 643.

¹³ Sovereigns in many eras, including the Pahlavis, cultivated Persepolis as a site of memory that could imply a connection with the past, no matter how tenuous or absurd (Shahbazi 1977; Mousavi 2002). For the Friday mosque constructed out of Achaemenid remains, ca. 660 C.E., see Whitcomb 1979, 363–66. For foundational work on Qajar use of ancient Iranian visual and archaeological heritage, see Grigor 2007, 2009.

¹⁴ Despite the propaganda of “revenge,” his most important goal was to prevent Persepolis' symbolic and monetary resources for kingship from falling in the hands of a usurper (Curt. 5.7.1–10; Diod. Sic. 17.72; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 38; cf. Arr. *Anab.* 3.18.11–12; Hammond 1992; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993; Wiesehöfer 1996, 104–6).

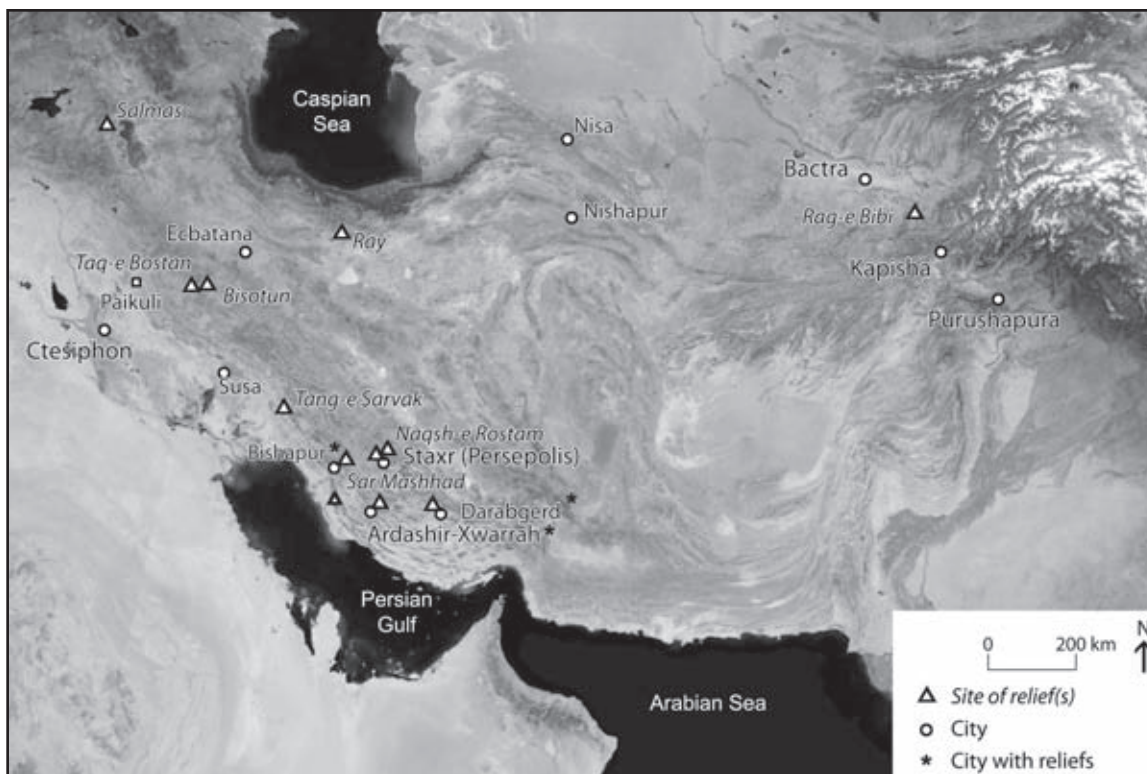


Fig. 1. Map of principal cities and sites of the Sasanian empire.

their original significance. Alexander made a show of caring for the Tomb of Cyrus to associate himself with the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty.¹⁵ Persepolis' significance as an aggressive, Macedonian victory monument did not endure long after Alexander's death. Despite its damaged state, the multivalent symbolic potential of the site attracted Alexander's successors quickly thereafter for different goals (see table 2). In 316, Peukestas, Alexander's companion whom he had appointed governor of Parsa, staged an elaborate banquet for his army at Persepolis before the showdown between Eumenes and Antigonos Monophthalmos, where he conducted lavish sacrifices to Alexander and Philip.¹⁶ The banquet hosted both Macedonian and Iranian contingents, and its seating arrangements and sacrifices evoke Persian protocol.¹⁷ This suggests

that Peukestas, popular and trusted among the Persian nobility, intended to capitalize on Persepolis as an open-ended symbol that could speak to the event's different constituencies.¹⁸

Herzfeld discovered five inscribed stone slabs in the vicinity of the platform of Persepolis, likely originally connected with cult furniture.¹⁹ These slabs bear Greek dedications to Zeus Megistos, Athena Basileia, Apollo, Artemis, and Helios as discrete deities, with no overt suggestion of assimilation to Iranian deities.²⁰ While the Macedonians could have created them in a calculated act of triumphal imperialism after the initial sack of Persepolis, Peukestas' banquet provides their likeliest original context.²¹ Whatever their origin or purpose, the installation of these slabs provides archaeological evidence of an important shift in Persepolis'

¹⁵ Arr. *Anab.* 6.29.4–14; cf. Strabo 15.3–7.

¹⁶ Diod. Sic. 19.22–3; Plut. *Vit. Eum.* 14.3; Billows 1995, 35; 1997, 93.

¹⁷ Calmeyer 1982, 185; Wiesehöfer 1991, 130; 1994a, 53–4; Henkelman 2007.

¹⁸ Wiesehöfer 1996, 107; 2007, 38–9.

¹⁹ The slabs were not associated archaeologically with the later "Fratarakid Temple," though Herzfeld (1935, 44–6) guessed that that was their origin; see also Wiesehöfer 2007,

39.

²⁰ Herzfeld's hypothesis that they arose from Iranian patronage and honored Iranian gods assimilated to the Greek pantheon should not be discounted, nor should a later reinterpretation in an Iranian manner be rejected (Boyce 1991, 107). Both practices were important religious and political tools in Hellenistic and early Arsacid Iran.

²¹ Wiesehöfer 1996, 108.

Table 2. Macedonian Kings and Satraps of Iran.

Name	Dates of Control over Iran (B.C.E.)	Dynasty
Alexander III the Great	330–323	Argead
Peukestas	324–316	satrap of Parsa
Antigonos Monophthalmos	316–312	Antigonid
Seleukos I Nikator	312–281	Seleucid
Antiochos I Soter	291–281 (coruler); 281–261 (sole ruler)	Seleucid
Antiochos II Theos	261–246	Seleucid
Seleukos II Kallinikos	246–225	Seleucid
Seleukos III Keraunos	225–223	Seleucid
Antiochos III the Great	223–187	Seleucid
Seleukos IV Philopator	187–175	Seleucid
Antiochos IV Epiphanes	175–164	Seleucid
Antiochos V Eupator	164–162	Seleucid
Demetrios I Soter	162–150	Seleucid
Alexander Balas	150–145	Seleucid
Demetrios II Nikator	145–139	Seleucid

significance away from its original function, as palace and ceremonial center of the Achaemenid empire, to one that capitalized on a more generalized symbolism deriving from its new, more malleable status as a ruin. This also marks the beginning of centuries of Middle Iranian ritual and artistic activity focused on recovering, reanimating, and eventually reinventing the site's power.

By the beginning of the second century B.C.E., local rulers, rather than Macedonian governors, administered Pars (table 4).²² They remained loyal vassals of the Seleucids while that dynasty held power; however, within their province, which they ruled largely autonomously, they pursued a vigorous program of engagement with the Achaemenid past.²³ They called themselves *fratarakā*, a title that derived from the Old

Table 3. Early Sasanian Kings of Kings.

Name	Regnal Dates (C.E.)
Ardashir I	224–239/40
Shapur I	239/40–270/2
Hormozd I	270/2–273
Bahram I	273–276
Bahram II	276–293
Bahram III	293
Narseh	293–302
Hormozd II	302–309
Shapur II	309–379

²² Wiesehöfer 2001.

²³ Wiesehöfer 1996, 109–10; 2007, 41–3. The majority of our evidence is numismatic, for which Alam (1986) serves as the standard reference. The coinage of Fratarakid Pars can be classified into four groups: Group A (Alam 1986, 511–43), Group B (Alam 1986, 544–63), Group C (Alam 1986, 564–86), and Group D (Alam 1986, 587–655). With some variation in details and minor elements, Group A (ca. early second century B.C.E.) and B (ca. second century B.C.E.) portray the ruler's head facing right on the obverse, with a rectangular structure topped with three crenellations, venerated by a standing figure. As well as becoming progressively more styl-

ized, Group B is distinguished by a change in the crenellations, showing two flanking step structures instead of three. Group C (ca. first century B.C.E.) marks a break with the earlier tradition and parallels the province's new incorporation into the Arsacid empire: the rulers display Arsacid hairstyles and regalia and now face left. The reverses show a simplified scene of a standing figure holding a *barsom* in front of a simple fire altar. Group D (which encompasses the early Sasanians) shows greater variation in reverse types, portraying diadems, investitures, and heavenly bodies, among other symbols. For a useful overview, see Haerinck and Overlaet 2008, 208–9.

Table 4. Pre-Sasanian Rulers of Pars (Reconstructed from Coinage).

Name	Approximate Date	Title (Suzerain)
Baydad	end of third century/ beginning of second century B.C.E.	<i>Fratarakā</i> (sub-Seleucid)
Ardaxshir I	first half of second century B.C.E.	<i>Fratarakā</i> (sub-Seleucid)
Wahbarz	first half of second century B.C.E.	<i>Fratarakā</i> (sub-Seleucid)
Wadfrdad I	mid second century B.C.E.	<i>Fratarakā</i> (sub-Seleucid)
Wadfrdad II	ca. 140 B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Unknown King I	second half of second century B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Darew I	third quarter of second century B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Wadfrdad III	first half of first century B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Darew II	beginning of first century B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Ardaxshir II	second half of first century B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Wahshir	second half of first century B.C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Pakor I	first half of first century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Pakor II	first half of first century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Nambad	mid first century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Napad	second half of first century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Unknown King II	end of first century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Wadfrdad IV	first half of second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Manchir I	first half of second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Ardaxshir III	first half of second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Manchir II	mid second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Unknown King III	second half of second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Manchir III	second half of second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Ardaxshir IV	end of second century C.E.	<i>šāh</i> (sub-Arsacid)
Shabuhr (New Persian: Shapur; brother of Ardashir I, founder of the Sasanian empire)	beginning of third century C.E.	<i>šāh</i>

Persian title of a subsatrapal Achaemenid governor, and, while they did not hold imperial pretensions, they continued to use many of the old Achaemenid names, including Darew (from Old Persian *Dārayavauš*) and Ardashir (from Old Persian *Artaxšaça*).²⁴ The archaeological and visual evidence firmly indicates that the Fratarakids engaged Achaemenid visual culture as a prestigious starting point for their own official

representations.²⁵ The early obverse coin portraits of the Fratarakid rulers show the influences of Hellenistic royal portraits and incorporate some symbols of Hellenistic kingship, such as the diadem. The dominant symbol of their rule, however, was the **kūrpāsa*, headgear originally worn by satraps who served the Achaemenid empire.²⁶ The reverses of tetradrachms of the Fratarakid Baydad portray the ruler enthroned

²⁴ Frye 1984, 272; Boyce 1991, 110–16; Wiesehöfer 1996, 109–10; 2001. An inscription on a Hellenistic-style bowl in the Getty refers to these rulers as *dārāyānagān* (“of the lineage of Darius [I]”) and presents a rare non-numismatic piece of evidence of the persistent memory of the Achaemenids (Skjerve 1997; Callieri 2007, 131).

²⁵ de Jong 2003; Panaino 2003; Potts 2007.

²⁶ Rendered by Greek historians as *kyrbasia*, reconstructed as Old Iranian **kūrpāsa* (Shahbazi 1992). Some Greek sources refer to this satrapal headgear as the *tiara apagēs* (Wiesehöfer 2007, 43).

in an Achaemenid-style throne holding a flower in his left hand. His costume is clearly satrapal rather than imitative of Achaemenid royal regalia. Although the figure holds a scepter as in the Achaemenid reliefs, Seleucid rather than Persian models inspired the form of the scepter.²⁷

In addition to their regalia, the Fratarakids incorporated into their coins aspects of the most prominent features of Achaemenid royal architecture and architectural ornament that still existed around them.²⁸ Most of the Fratarakid coins depict a winged disk with a male bust emerging from it, recognizable on every Achaemenid royal tomb, many prominent reliefs at Persepolis, and many seals (fig. 2).²⁹ On most issues, this divine figure hovers over a stepped rectangular structure with coffering or coffered doors that recalls Achaemenid architectural forms and post-Achaemenid crenellations at Persepolis. Speculations on the identity of the structure on the reverses of the coins have proliferated; however, the most cogent interpretation of the iconography, not to mention the only one grounded in primary source material (i.e., archaeological evidence), argues that it was inspired by Achaemenid architecture, possibly the Achaemenid towers such as were built at Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargadae.³⁰ Although we will likely never know the exact function or identity of the structure, on most issues, a male figure stands next to it in a posture directly inspired by the composition and posture of the Achaemenid kings of kings on their tombs: the figures face right, raising their right hand to the winged figure above. The figures hold their bow with the bowstring facing away from the object of veneration. This is the same posture of respect shown by the Achaemenid sovereigns on the tomb reliefs. The bow, however, is of a contemporary, recurve style, rather than a direct copy of those on the Achaemenid reliefs.³¹



Fig. 2. Reverse of a tetradrachma of the Fratarakid Wadfradad I, ca. 150 B.C.E., diam. 28 mm, wt. 12.77 g (Alram 1986, no. 533; courtesy T.K. Mallon-McCorgray).

A discrete break with early Fratarakid coin types occurs only after Pars submitted to the Arsacids.³² The coinage of Wadfradad II, the first ruler of Pars thought to acknowledge Arsacid suzerainty, marks a transition, and after Darew II, the obverse portraits clearly follow Arsacid royal iconography.³³ The reverse types change as well but do not follow Arsacid models. Achaemenid iconography appears also to have inspired these new types. The reverses of most of these portray a male figure in profile, facing a fire altar broadly similar to the fire altars on all Achaemenid tombs and many of the seals.³⁴

The Fratarakids built both on and near the platform of Persepolis. A group of structures located 300 m north of the platform show characteristics of a palace and a shrine where the inhabitants honored the gods with a statue, a fire, or some combination thereof.³⁵ These post-Achaemenid mudbrick structures employed some carefully chosen and reworked

²⁷ Wiesehöfer 2007, 43.

²⁸ Boyce 1991, 116–18; Trümpelmann 1992, 52–5; Wiesehöfer 2001.

²⁹ Alram 1986, pls. 17.533, 18.533–59, 19.560–63.

³⁰ This is by far the most common reverse type in the Fratarakid coinage (Alram 1986, pls. 17.518–34, 17.545–47, 18.535–59, 19.560–67; de Morgan 1979, 277–81, figs. 340–51). Palace H in Persepolis preserves remains of post-Achaemenid crenellation that is very close to that on the roof of the tower on the reverses of the Fratarakid coinage (Gnoli 1989, 124–25; Trümpelmann 1992, 53–4). Potts (2007) presents a useful historiographical overview of this debate as well as cogent evaluation of the scholarship and evidence. Haerink and Overlaet (2008) argued that the images on the coins represent Graeco-Roman-style open-air altars, such as the Ara Pacis. Haerink and Overlaet present a very detailed argument; however, without archaeological evidence of the presence of such altars in Pars, I am not prepared to discard the possibility

that the structures relate to the Achaemenid architecture of Pars and the province's Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid towers.

³¹ Wiesehöfer 2007, 43.

³² They exchanged the ancient title of *fratarakā* for that of king (*šāh*), matching Arsacid conventions (Potts 2007, 276). The upheavals following Antiochos IV's invasions of Egypt provide the backdrop to the Seleucids' eventual loss of Pars. See Mittag (2006) for in-depth analysis of these events.

³³ Potts 2007, 276; Wiesehöfer 2007, 45.

³⁴ Alram 1986, nos. 564–86 (Group C); Garrison and Root 2001; Root 2008.

³⁵ Herzfeld 1935, 46. This room yielded column bases and a large stone block that could have served as a statue base (Schmidt 1953, 55–6; Schippmann 1971a, 177–82). Although the exact chronology of this building activity is unclear, Tilia's excavations revealed extensive remodeling and spoliation of the site (Tilia 1972–1978, 316; 1977, 74–5).

Achaemenid stone architectural members, such as a doorjamb and lintel, all taken from material at Persepolis.³⁶ The Fratarakids removed a doorway from the *tačara* (private palace) of Darius I. With its depictions of beardless eunuch servants in profile wearing Persian robes and carrying personal articles of the king (as in other relief sculpture there), incorporated into its new context, it is possible the Fratarakids gave these figures a new interpretation or identity. A window jamb associated archaeologically with the sacred area of the complex carries the simple, low-relief images of two figures in profile. They hold ritual paraphernalia in their hands in a contemporary Middle Iranian gesture of reverence.³⁷ The window that the jamb decorated communicated with the antechamber to the inner sacred area, linking their actions to the sacred area inside.³⁸ Although they were Fratarakid creations, the iconography on these reliefs responds to and reinterprets aspects of the Achaemenid reliefs, adapting their striding profile and outstretched, raised arms to contemporary post-Achaemenid, Persian visual culture. If Islamic accounts can be believed, the Temple of Anahid in Staxr, of which the Sasanians took over the hereditary priesthood, similarly integrated elements of Achaemenid architecture such as bull capitals and reliefs.³⁹

More remarkable for their absence, the Arsacids apparently never sponsored any activity in the Achaemenid ruins of the province, nor did they carve a rock relief in Pars near the Achaemenid tombs. Arsacid kings appeared in monuments in other provinces in their empire, such as the rock relief of Mithridates I at Khong-e Nowruzi, deep in Elymaïs.⁴⁰ One can conjecture that this dearth of Arsacid evidence in Pars is the result of the Sasanians' particularly thorough job of obliterating their monuments, as occurred at Bisotun, or simply because by this time, Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam no longer held any special significance beyond the province. Bisotun, the site of Darius I's monumental

rock relief and inscription, preserves limited evidence of Arsacid engagement with the Achaemenid site. Although they do not match the scale or intricacy of the Sasanian material in Pars, Mithridates II, Gotarzes II, and a king named Vologases carved reliefs several meters distant, on Bisotun's lower rock face or in the field to the north, though, given their orientation, these were intended to engage with Bisotun's walled sanctuary below rather than with Darius I's relief.⁴¹

All told, Achaemenid visual culture and architectural traditions enjoyed a longer afterlife in Pars than anywhere else, both as spolia and reinterpreted new creations. By incorporating Achaemenid iconography into their own visual culture and Achaemenid sites into their ritual life, the Fratarakids implied that some sort of meaningful, if not lineal, relationship existed between them and the Achaemenid empire. Without further evidence, we are unable to elaborate on the nature of this relationship; however, the Sasanians' predecessors in Pars presaged much of the intricacy, albeit not the scale, of many of the later Sasanian practices. These include ritual engagement with Achaemenid sites, creative reuse of Achaemenid architectural elements in newly created structures, and selective integration of Achaemenid visual culture in their own images. Although carried out on a small scale, this suggests a regional set of memory practices that challenged the early, pre-imperial Sasanians as they clawed their way up to provincial power in the early third century.

EARLY SASANIAN MEMORY PRACTICES IN PARS

The founder of the Sasanian empire, Ardashir I, led his family's rise from obscure, local garrison commanders to provincial kings by systematically assassinating neighboring chieftains and annexing their domains.⁴² The family overthrew the king of Pars in 212 C.E., setting up an eventual conflict with the Arsacid king of kings, Ardawan IV. During the Sasanians'

³⁶ Schmidt 1953, 55–6.

³⁷ Schmidt 1953, 51, figs. A–C; Shahbazi 1986; Choksy 1990a, 30–5; 1990b, 201–5.

³⁸ Schmidt 1953, 50, fig. 16, no. 4.

³⁹ al-Mas'udi *Muruj al-dahab* (Barbier de Meynard 1865, para. 1403 [4.77]). Although Boyce (1975, 459–65; 1997) argued this structure was built by the Achaemenids, without any archaeological evidence of the Achaemenid fire temple (or any other Achaemenid temple for that matter), the weight of the evidence suggests that it was created with spolia in Staxr or in a reoccupied part of Persepolis by the Fratarakids, or by the Sasanians themselves.

⁴⁰ Vanden Berghe 1983, 47–8; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 32–8.

⁴¹ Canepa (forthcoming). One of the five Arsacid kings of

kings named Walaxš (Vologases) carved the so-called Parthian stone, located several meters away from the cliff (Luschey 1990, 293; von Gall 1996a, 1996b; Kleiss 1970, 1996). On the wider possibilities and problems relating to Parthian engagement with the Achaemenids, see Shayegan 1999; Fowler 2006. Harper (2006, 6 n. 9) cites Ghirshman (1976, pl. 41.6) as evidence of Parthian reuse of Achaemenid architectural members at Bard-e Neshanda; however, in his text, Ghirshman (1952, 8; 1976, 199–200) is clear that these were the same six column bases he discovered in the painted Sasanian room in Susa, not, as it appears in Harper's text, from the Parthian level of Bard-e Neshanda.

⁴² Daryaee 2009, 3–4. Al-Tabari provides the most detailed story of the Sasanians' rise and likely reflects official propaganda (Shahbazi 2005a).

bloody two-decade rise from local dynasts to kings of kings, Pars' monumental patrimony again played an important role as raw material for expressing a vision of Iranian kingship for a new regime. Once in power, the Sasanians took possession of Staxr and its surrounding symbolic landscape, being driven to match and supercede their predecessors' engagement with the Achaemenid structures.

Persepolis contains the earliest evidence for a growing repertoire of Sasanian memory practices from this early pre-imperial period (205/6–224).⁴³ The early Sasanians marked the site subtly but permanently, sponsoring a number of small, detailed portraits of themselves and their court incised into doorways and window frames in the Harem of Xerxes and the *tačara* of Darius I (fig. 3).⁴⁴ The chronology and identity of the figures in these remarkable miniature reliefs are not entirely clear; however, comparisons with their coinage suggest that they represent Ardashir I's father, Papag, and brother, Shapur.⁴⁵ Despite their small size, the basic ideological operations that they undertake are not only quite complex, they also set a conceptual precedent for later Sasanian endeavors carried out on a truly monumental scale. These images claimed Persepolis for the dynasty, putting their mark onto a prestigious site occupied by successive generations of Macedonian governors, Fratarakids, and likely the Sasanians' own deposed rivals. More importantly, by incising their images into the very substance of the Achaemenid structures, the early Sasanians began a process of fusing their fledgling dynasty tangibly and permanently to the remains of the ancient Persian past. This fusion provided physical and visual evidence of the otherwise unfounded antiquity and dubious lineage of the Sasanians. It should be noted that this technique did not depend on exact knowledge of the original patron of the ruins. It capitalized primarily on the inherent antiquity of the structures, grafting the Sasanians onto the contemporary stature of the ruins in Pars' collective experience.

Ritual performance, though ephemeral, established a similarly meaningful link between the new kings and the ancient site. The graffiti themselves record a number of ritual activities, all in some way related to offering respect or homage. These cohere



Fig. 3. Sasanian graffiti portraying a king offering a diadem, ca. 212–218 C.E., from Persepolis, Harem of Xerxes.

well with later records of Sasanian activities at the site. They portray the kings in stately procession with their courtiers; standing, offering incense at altars, or proffering honorary diadems, presumably intended to relate to an actual image or altar or simply to the site itself. Of a different tenor, Persepolis even plays a role in Ardashir I's accession. Upon the death of his father (Papag), Ardashir's older brother Shapur became king, a fact that Ardashir, then a petty prince, disputed.⁴⁶ If al-Tabari can be believed, on his way to confront Ardashir, Shapur stopped at Persepolis, where part of a building fell on him and killed him. Whether the masonry fell by accident or with a push from one of Ardashir's agents, Ardashir's remaining brothers subsequently met him at Persepolis, where they elected and crowned him king.⁴⁷ Like the incised portraits, it suggests that the Sasanians inherited from

⁴³ The beginning of the Sasanian era occurred in 205/6, according to the Middle Persian inscription on the Stele of Bishapur dedicated to Shapur I (Frye 1984, 291–96; Wiesehöfer 1987, 372; Schippmann 1990, 10–20).

⁴⁴ Herzfeld 1941, 307–9; Schmidt 1953, fig. 99a, b; Calmeyer 1976, 63–8, figs. 3, 4; Trümpelmann 1992, 53; Callieri 2003; 2007, 132–34.

⁴⁵ Based on the numismatic evidence, the scholarly consensus is that these represent the early Sasanians; cf., e.g., these

images with the headdress on the coins of Shapur (Alram 1986, pl. 22.653–55; Huff 2008, 32–3). For an alternate interpretation, see Wiesehöfer 2007, 47. See Callieri (2003) for an account of earlier identifications of these figures.

⁴⁶ The fact that Shapur I honors his uncle Shapur, the son of Papag, as a king need not cause us pause (al-Tabari 816 [Bosworth 1999, 8–9]).

⁴⁷ al-Tabari 816 (Bosworth 1999, 8–9); Daryaee 2009, 4.

their pre-imperial Persian forebearers a tendency to express their ideas of power in Achaemenid contexts, not only visually but through ritual practice. Taken as a whole, the early Sasanians' memory practices on the platform of Persepolis provided a precedent and inspiration for their later, more ambitious activities once Ardashir I took supreme power.

Innovation in Urban and Natural Topographies of Memory at Ardashir-Xwarrah

Once he had consolidated power in Pars but before his final victory, Ardashir I withdrew to a site endowed with exceptional natural defensive capabilities about 125 km south from the less easily defended city of Staxr. There he built Ardashir-Xwarrah ("Royal Glory of Ardashir"), known from the 10th century as Firuzabad (fig. 4).⁴⁸ The city not only served as his stronghold against an anticipated Arsacid reaction but also as the king of kings' great experiment in city planning and memorial practices.⁴⁹ Reflective of his developing ideas of kingship, it presents an urban plan of a sovereign who intended the city not only to function as the center of an empire but also to symbolize the centrality of the king of kings.⁵⁰ The king of kings laid out the city in a perfect circle with a diameter of 1,850 m.⁵¹ Twenty radial roadways extend well past the fortifications up the cliffs and out into the surrounding countryside, and an inner fortified area contained a central watchtower and a fire temple provisioned with cisterns. Far from an unbroken, ancient Near Eastern tradition, a precisely circular city on such a scale was without precedent.⁵²

While the city and buildings of Ardashir-Xwarrah were radically unique in design, Ardashir I anchored it in the ancient Persian past by adapting practices developed by the Fratarakids and his family at Persepolis. The city and its official structures repeatedly present self-consciously innovative designs but use architectural forms and even imported architectural members from Persepolis to cloak the new creations

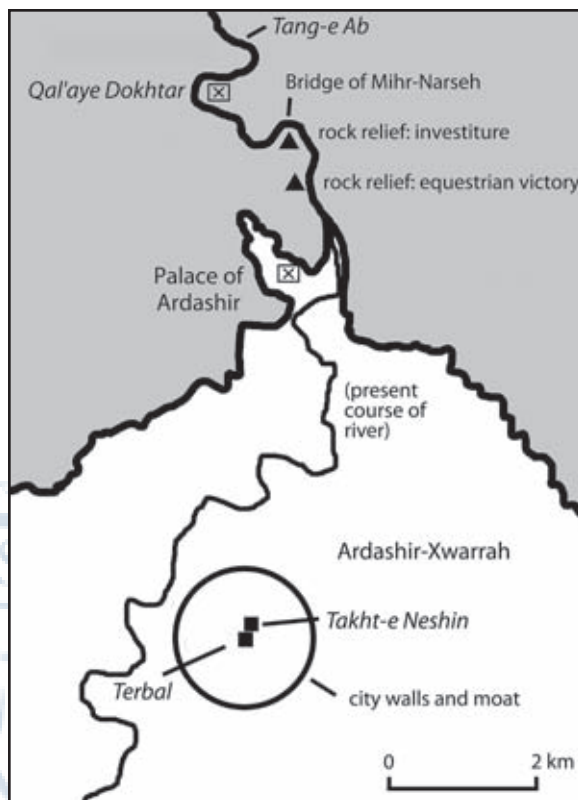


Fig. 4. Map of Ardashir-Xwarrah (present-day Firuzabad, Iran) and surrounding features.

in the august architectural forms of the "ancestors" of the king of kings. The stucco ornament around the niches of both of Ardashir's palaces, the Qal'aye-Dokhtar and the Great Palace, carefully translate the shapes of the stone cornices crowning Persepolitan doorways. Traces of stucco on the tower (the Terbal) indicate that it bore such motifs as well (figs. 5, 6).⁵³ The Qal'aye-Dokhtar, a mountaintop fortress that controlled the northern entrance into the valley, employed such experimental architecture that its walls

⁴⁸ Location: 28°51'8.82"N, 52°31'55.20"E.

⁴⁹ Gyselen 1989, 44.

⁵⁰ This idea is explored most thoroughly in the work of Huff (Huff 1969–1970, 1972, 1976, 2008; Huff and Gignoux 1976). It has been argued that these early ideals of a centralized empire contrast with the later balance of power that developed between Parthians and Persians (Pourshariati 2008).

⁵¹ Huff 2008, 45. For the best overview of Huff's work at Firuzabad and the city's urban fabric, see Huff 1999. For the fire temple, see Huff 1972; see also Schippmann (1971a, 100–22) for earlier scholarship and literary attestations.

⁵² Off-cited earlier "circular" cities were irregular sprawls rather than carefully planned circles. Under Ardashir I,

Darabgerd was triangular, only converted to a circular layout under the Arab governor of Fars in the late seventh/early eighth century when circular cities, such as Baghdad, began to come back into vogue with Sasanian inspiration (Novák 1999, 214–29; Huff 2008, 51–2; cf. Dettmann 1969, 203). Ardashir I founded the city of Weh-Ardashir in Ctesiphon on a circular plan with Ardashir-Xwarrah as the likely precedent (Kröger 1992).

⁵³ Huff 1971; Huff and Gignoux 1976, 134–36; Kröger 1982, 197–98; cf. Roaf 1998, 3–4. In earlier scholarship, the Great Palace was erroneously referred to as the Ateshkade (the Fire Temple), a name sometimes still encountered.



Fig. 5. Fragmentary cavetto cornice inspired by Persepolis molded out of stucco at Ardashir I's fortress of Qal'aye-Dokhtar, from Ardashir-Xwarrah, in July 2001 (now destroyed by exposure to the elements).

began to shift and crack even before it was finished.⁵⁴ The Great Palace, built without fortifications in the valley below after Ardashir's final victory, used much less risky designs but still employed complex dome and vault construction (fig. 7).⁵⁵ Contrasting with its innovative design, Achaemenid cavetto cornices translated into stucco articulate the niches in the domed interior spaces (fig. 8). The main fire temple (the Takht-e Neshin), a domed, cruciform structure with radiating *ayvāns*, incorporated Achaemenid column shafts, which were brought to the site; these, and the



Fig. 6. Remains of the masonry platform of the Takht-e Neshin with the Terbal in the background, before 224 C.E., from Ardashir-Xwarrah.

ashlar masonry, evoke Achaemenid platforms such as at Pasargadae.⁵⁶ The area before Ardashir I's palace even hints at a double stairway in imitation of the Persepolitan stairway leading up to the main entrance, though without further excavation, this cannot be conclusively determined.⁵⁷

At this point, the "Achaemenidizing" architectural motifs signified Persian antiquity in a general sense and succeeded in encapsulating and exporting the prestige of the ruins at Staxr.⁵⁸ The city and its grand structures reinforce in architectural and visual terms the idea that Ardashir I not only was the rightful heir of the Persian heritage but also was responsible for renewing it. Like the reoccupation of Persepolis in previous generations, the exact identity and history of their Persian predecessors who initially created these forms was not important for these ornamental and architectural motifs to be powerful; rather, it was the general experience of their antiquity and value that was significant.

After he defeated Ardawan IV, Ardashir I carved two monumental rock reliefs into the cliffs of the

⁵⁴ Although the Qal'aye-Dokhtar likely did not serve long as the official residence, considering the cracks and the much more convenient palace on the plain below, its presence on the canyon cliffs high above would have been disheartening to any invading army and awe inspiring to any entering the valley. Yazdgerd III did, however, fortify it again against the Arabs at the end of the empire (Huff 2008, 44).

⁵⁵ Huff 2008, 42–4.

⁵⁶ According to Huff (1969–1970; 1972, 536–40; 2008, 47–9), the masonry techniques match contemporary Roman techniques, indicating it was not an Achaemenid construction as some have conjectured. An *ayvān* is a New Persian term for entranceway or balcony that scholarship has adopted as a

technical term to refer specifically to the monumental barrel-vaulted entranceways favored particularly by the Sasanians, although the architectural form enjoyed a long history in the development of Iranian architecture.

⁵⁷ Huff 2008, 54. The double Persepolitan entranceway also occurred in the Sasanian constructions at Kangavar (Azarnoush 1981, 2009).

⁵⁸ Fragments excavated by Schmidt in the Sasanian buildings clustered around the Ka'ba indicate this same type of Achaemenid ornament was applied in structures at Naqsh-e Rostam, too (Schmidt 1970, 75, fig. 30, no. 23 [field 2.39]; Kröger 1982, 196–97).



Fig. 7. Exterior view of the Great Palace of Ardashir I at Ardashir-Xwarrah, after 224 C.E. View of the central barrel-vaulted entranceway (partially restored) leading to three domed chambers.



Fig. 8. Detail of Achaemenid-inspired cavetto cornices in central domed chamber, ca. 224 C.E., from Ardashir-Xwarrah, the Great Palace of Ardashir I.

Tang-e Ab, a narrow gorge that served as the northern entrance to the valley. They depict Ardashir I unhorsing the Arsacid king and an investiture scene in

which the king of kings receives the royal diadem from Ohrmazd.⁵⁹ The Sasanian practice of carving monumental reliefs, the most enduring of their technologies of memory and deserving of a separate study in its own right, reflects a knowledge of and engagement with the collective remnants of their predecessors (Lullubi, Elamite, Assyrian, Achaemenid, Seleucid, or Arsacid) that were visible then as now.⁶⁰ The Sasanians not only surpassed all other dynasties in the volume of rock reliefs, they also used them in a way that was ultimately quite distinctive, stemming from their early experiences of the region around Staxr.⁶¹ The impact of the Achaemenids' monumental rock-cut tombs and Elamite reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam would have directly introduced the king of kings to the powerful effect that this genre could have. These complementary techniques of subtle ornamental appropriation and the creation of an environment marked with rock reliefs made Ardashir I's political claims visible as an innate part of the architectural and natural order of things. Ardashir I's early experimentations at Ardashir-Xwarrah, in turn, provided precedents for Naqsh-e Rostam, the supreme site of memory established by the dynasty.

Naqsh-e Rostam: From Achaemenid Necropolis to Sasanian Site of Memory

Out of all the sites that the early Sasanians favored for commemorative activity, the site of Naqsh-e Rostam stands out as preeminent (figs. 9–11). It lies about 8 km north of the ruins of Persepolis, 25 km south of Cyrus' capital, Pasargadae, and only 2 km from Staxr. The New Persian place-name refers to a cluster of relief sculptures carved onto the southern rock face of one of several flat-topped rock hills that project into the plain of Persepolis, not far from a ford in the nearby river. The site had some sort of importance in the Elamite era but was transformed by Darius I to serve as the main royal necropolis for the Achaemenid dynasty. The Achaemenids and the Sasanians both carved more rock reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam than at

⁵⁹ Vanden Berghe 1983, 61–6.

⁶⁰ Canepa (forthcoming). Following conventions established by the sites' early surveyors, Iranian rock reliefs are identified by their New Persian place-name and a number that corresponds to a topographical place, not the order in which they were created. The most useful catalogues of rock reliefs in Iran are Vanden Berghe 1983; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985. Vanden Berghe's numbering and most of his attributions reflect present scholarly consensus. The exceptions are Taq-e Bostan I (possibly Ardashir II because of internal elements such as the late fourth-century style of clothing of the middle figure [Shahbazi 1985; Canepa 2009, 108–9; cf. Azarnoush 1986]), Bishapur VI (which, as I believe Ghirshman [1950] correctly observed, contains more peoples than just the Romans in this triumphal scene [Vanden

Berghe 1980; earlier bibliography in Herrmann 1981, 32–8]), and Naqsh-e Rostam 3 and 4, for which there is no real consensus. For recent research on the iconographic conventions of Sasanian rock reliefs, see Soudavar 2009.

⁶¹ Vanden Berghe 1983, 57. As well as Vanden Berghe's catalogue overview, the main documentary publications of the Sasanian rock reliefs include Fukai and Horiuchi 1969, 1972; Schmidt 1970; Herrmann and Howell 1977; Herrmann 1980, 1981, 1983; Huff 1984; Vanden Berghe 1986; Herrmann et al. 1989. Most other literature published between 1978 and 2003 is collected in Vanden Berghe's *Bibliographie analytique* and its supplements (Vanden Berghe et al. 1979; Vanden Berghe and Haerinck 1981, 1987; Haerinck and Stevens 1996, 2005). For post-2003 material, see Canepa 2009.



Fig. 9. View of the northeastern portion of the site of Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran (from *left to right*): the Achaemenid tombs of Artaxerxes I(?), Darius I, and Xerxes I(?); *below*, the Sasanian relief of Hormozd II with unfinished enthronement scene; *above*, reliefs of Shapur I and Kerdir, double joust relief of Bahram II(?), investiture relief of Narseh, and the large unfinished relief with ossuaries.

any other site in the province or empire. The wealth of sculptural, architectural, and inscriptional features from these two temporally disparate dynasties suggests that it served as a ritual and symbolic center unparalleled elsewhere in the empire. The main constituents of Naqsh-e Rostam are traces of Elamite reliefs, four Achaemenid funerary reliefs, one mysterious Achaemenid tower of ashlar masonry known as the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht ("the Ka'ba of Zoroaster"), and eight completed Sasanian bas-relief sculptures (see fig. 11).⁶² The Sasanians carved rock reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam from the third to the early fourth centuries; however, numerous minor features in the surrounding area, such as rock-hewn mountaintop or cliffside ossuaries for the deposition of the bones of Zoroastrian faithful, continued to be created until the Arab invasion,

indicating that the site was in use and important for the local nobility until the end of the dynasty.⁶³ Sasanian dirt ramparts extended from the cliffside and enclosed an extensive area around the Ka'ba.⁶⁴ Although the area within the fortification wall has not been fully excavated, Schmidt's tests indicated that a dense concentration of Sasanian buildings clustered within the walls.⁶⁵

What is remarkable about the Sasanian dynasty's additions to the site is not simply their monumentality but the extent to which they sensitively, seamlessly, and unrelentingly incorporated the Achaemenid material into their larger vision. Here, the first two great kings of kings of the dynasty adapted and expanded pre-imperial Sasanian practices such as incising their identities visually or epigraphically directly

⁶² One of the Achaemenid tombs is securely attributed to Darius I by its inscription. Schmidt (1970, 79–107) attributed the others to Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II on the basis of relative wear and style. The Elamite reliefs date to 1700 B.C.E. and the eighth–ninth centuries B.C.E. (Vanden Berghe 1983, 26–7, 66; Seidl 1986). In 1971, when the ground was leveled to accommodate the shah's "anniversary celebrations," two minor reliefs of a lion and male figure were revealed (Roaf 1974). It is possible that more minor reliefs lie below ground level. The site also contains an unfinished re-

lief, possibly started during Khosrow II's reprisal of the genre in the seventh century, on which an inscription was carved during the Qajar era. Nearby, there lies an Islamic shrine, the Emamzade Saf-e Mohammad (Stronach 1966, 217).

⁶³ Several have inscriptions dating them to the late Sasanian period (Trümpelmann 1992, 17–24; Huff 1998, 2004).

⁶⁴ The walls have been dated tentatively to the third century C.E. (Kleiss 2001; Gropp 2004).

⁶⁵ Schmidt 1970, 54–8; Schippmann 1971b; Kleiss 1976, 142–50; Trümpelmann 1992, 49–51.

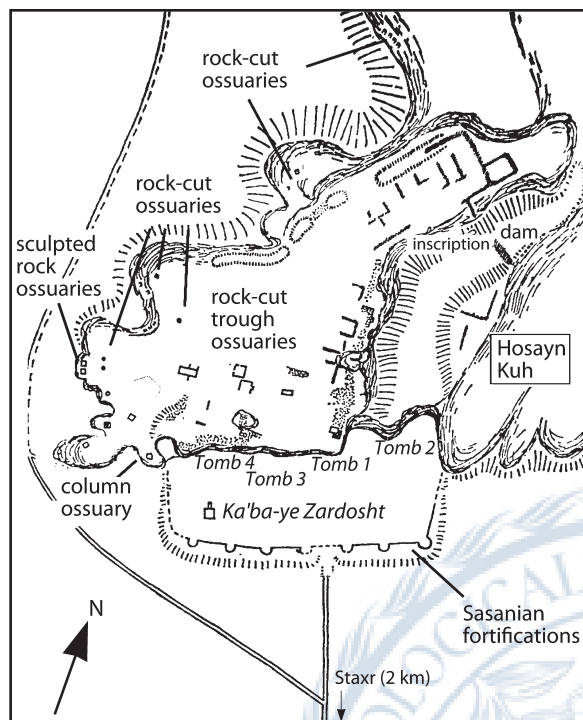


Fig. 10. Map of Hosayn Kuh and Naqsh-e Rostam (adapted from Kleiss 1976, fig. 13).

into Achaemenid features and using them as a stage for ritual practice. This engagement went far beyond a superficial interest in the Achaemenid remains: the intense building activity and rituals performed at the site created a coherent experience of a single cultural, dynastic, and historical whole. Furthermore, parallels between the visual, discursive, and ritual expressions of the two dynasties are so startlingly close that it is

much more likely that some sort of causative, if not lineal relationship, lay behind the pronounced similarities than to posit that they were random, as has repeatedly been implied.⁶⁶

Although it is probable that the Fratarakids and pre-imperial Sasanians used the site, Ardashir I was responsible for forging the first enduring link between the Achaemenid remains and the Sasanian dynasty, thus beginning the full transformation of the site into a specifically Sasanian site of memory. At the site, which no king had modified since the Achaemenids, Ardashir I began the permanent fusion of the remains of the two dynasties by carving the first rock relief on the western end of the rock face (fig. 12).⁶⁷ This was the last relief he executed in Pars, and it combines the themes of his earlier reliefs—triumph and investiture—into a single, harmonious image.⁶⁸ It depicts a symmetrical composition of equestrian investiture and triumph, one that several of his successors would emulate.⁶⁹ Inscriptions on the horses identify the two figures as Ardashir I on the left, receiving the diadem from the great god Ohrmazd on the right.⁷⁰ They each trample the prone bodies of their defeated enemies, the Arsacid king Ardawan IV and Ahreman (Zoroastrianism's "demon of demons"). The symmetrical composition presents an audacious rhetorical statement, with a clear logic of equivalency between the historic earthly achievement and future apocalyptic act.

As well as grounding his recent defeat of the Arsacid king of kings in the inevitability of Zoroastrian eschatology, Ardashir I presented this novel statement as intrinsically ancient by selectively appropriating Achaemenid sculptural forms and finish.⁷¹ Details such as the high polish, treatment of horses, the human body, and drapery indicate that the craftsmen closely studied Achaemenid sculpture, with the relief scul-

⁶⁶ Studies with this implication are summarized in Daryaei 2001–2002, 3–4.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, his relief was not situated under the Achaemenid tombs in the area enclosed by the earthenwork walls (see fig. 11 herein).

⁶⁸ Five reliefs are securely attributed to the king of kings (listed chronologically): Firuzabad (Ardashir-Xwarrah) I and II, Naqsh-e Rostam I, Naqsh-e Rostam II, and Salmas (Vanden Berghe 1983, 62; Levit-Tawil 1993). Darabgerd coheres most closely with the themes of Shapur I's reliefs; however, the crown matches one he shared with his father during their co-regency rather than his normal regnal crown.

⁶⁹ One of Shapur I's two reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam (IV) portrays Ohrmazd investing the king of kings using the same symmetrical composition, although without the defeated enemies below. Shapur I's eldest son, Bahram I (271–274 C.E.), created a relief at Bishapur (V) very similar to this one. The earliest of Shapur I's three reliefs at Bishapur (I) again uses the

composition, this time with figures underneath the horses. In it, the Roman emperor Gordian III takes the place of the defeated Arsacid sovereign, Ardawan II, and the relief adds the additional figure of Philip the Arab genuflecting before the king of kings. See Canepa (2009, 59–68) for in-depth analysis of this relief in the context of Roman-Sasanian competition.

⁷⁰ On the left: "This is the visage of the Mazda-worshipping lord Ardashir, the King of Kings of Iran, who is of the radiant image of gods, son of the lord Papag, the king." On the right: "This is the visage of the god Ohrmazd" (Back 1978, 281–82). It is possible that this could have been added later under Shapur I. This would present an interesting scenario of further reinscription of the past by this sovereign. Middle Persian Ohrmazd/New Persian Hormozd (from Old Persian Auramazda; Avestan, Ahura Mazda) is the name of both the great god and several Sasanian kings.

⁷¹ Herrmann 1981, 151–60; Trümpelmann 1992, 62; Harper 2006, 15.

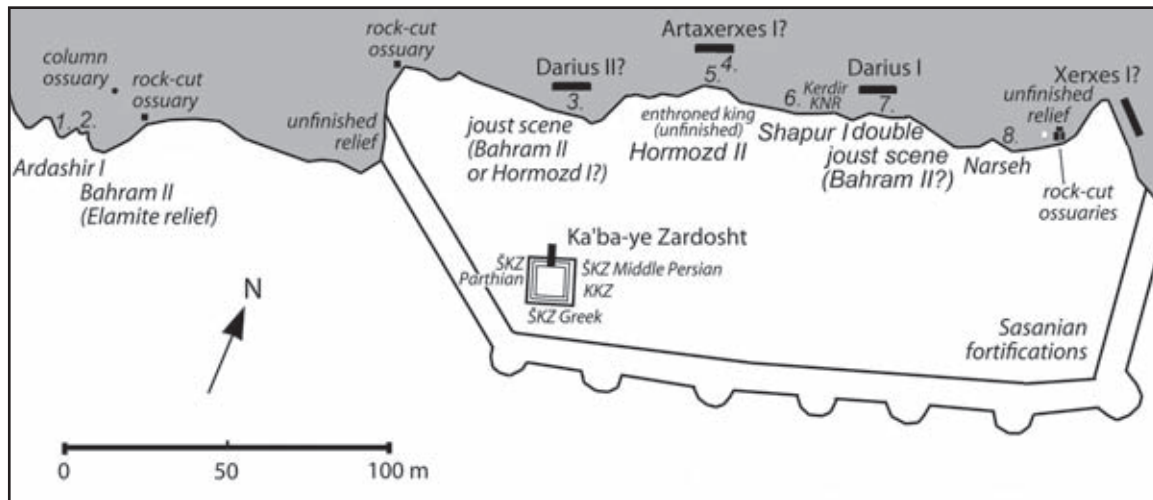


Fig. 11. Map of Naqsh-e Rostam. Arabic numerals indicate the Sasanian rock reliefs, Roman numerals indicate the Achaemenid tombs.



Fig. 12. Rock relief of Ardashir I, after 224 C.E., from Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief 1) (from left to right): a page, Ardashir I, and the god Ohrmazd; underhoof, Ardawan IV (left) and Ahreman (right).

ture of Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam providing ready examples to king and artisan alike.⁷² Both king and god ride horses whose proportions, thick neck, and head

position recall the fine steeds brought by Persepolitan tribute bearers (figs. 13, 14). The artisan sculpted Ohrmazd's right hand similarly to the hands of Persian

⁷²For valuable close analysis of sculptural forms and techniques at Persepolis, see Roaf 1983, 42 (for hands).



Fig. 13. Detail, Ohrmazd's horse and drapery folds. Rock relief of Ardashir I, from Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief I).



Fig. 14. Detail of the Armenian delegation leading a horse, from the south wing of the east side of the *apadāna*, Persepolis.

or Median soldiers and dignitaries who grasp their spears or staffs (fig. 15). The thumb, which tapers to a graceful point, rests on top, yet slightly behind, the index finger, while the backs of fingers repeat in parallel lines, visible from the knuckle back, with fingertips extending over the hollow of the palm.

The eyes of the god and king follow the design and sculptural forms of the Persepolis reliefs. A slightly raised border, with a subtle incision delineating either side, outlines the edges of the wide, almond-shaped eyes. Like the eyes at Persepolis, they protrude convexly from the sculptural plane. A similar sharp, raised border delineates the figures' brows. Although partially destroyed, the remnants of their noses indi-

cate the artisans gave the god and king profiles deliberately similar to the Persepolis reliefs. The folds of Ohrmazd's cloak ripple in regular zigzagging folds across his thigh, echoing the standard treatment of drapery of Persian robes in the Persepolis reliefs (see figs. 13, 15). The relief adapts the standard mode of representing beards at Persepolis, with repeated circular curls filling an upper zone that extends from the moustache across the upper cheeks and alternating circular curls and wavy lines, forming a more extensive lower zone (see figs. 15, 16). Finally, the Sasanian reliefs intentionally used motifs inspired by the representations of the Achaemenid kings to image the god Ohrmazd. Like those of the Achaemenid kings of kings, the god's beard is long, squared-off, and closely curled, in contrast to Ardashir I's contemporary fashion with the beard drawn into a fillet and ending in a bulbous bunch of curls. Ohrmazd's crenellated crown recalls the crowns of the Achaemenid kings and winged figure on the majority of the tombs overhead.⁷³



Fig. 15. Achaemenid king enthroned with a beard of a style representative of the Achaemenid beards of the king of kings visible at Naqsh-e Rostam. Relief originally from the *apadāna* but moved to the treasury in antiquity during the reign of Artaxerxes I.

⁷³ Henkelman 1995–1996, 284–86.



Fig. 16. Detail of Ohrmazd's beard and crown. Rock relief of Ardashir I, from Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief 1).

The reverses of Ardashir I's coinage regularly depict an enthroned fire altar, wherein altar and throne elements are drawn from Achaemenid portrayals at Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis (see figs. 15, 17).⁷⁴ Very similar to Ardashir I's use of Persian ornamental motifs at Ardashir-Xwarrah, the sculptural forms of his rock relief elegantly integrate and depart from the ancient precedents to present the viewer with a new expression of Persian kingship that was innovative yet rooted in the past.

In contrast to Ardashir I's single relief at Naqsh-e Rostam, his son, Shapur I, was responsible for fully converting the site into the complex site of memory it remained for the life of the empire. In order to manipulate the wider cultural memory surrounding Naqsh-e Rostam, Shapur I engaged with the site visually, inscriptionally, and ritually. He boldly carved a rock relief directly in the center of the four Achae-

menid tombs, in the space underneath the tomb of Darius I and the tomb attributed to Artaxerxes I (fig. 18). Unlike Ardashir I's relief, it lies within the bounds of the ramparts, across and slightly northeast from the Ka'ba. Shapur's relief is decidedly triumphal. It clearly commemorates his capture of the Roman emperor Valerian and the supposed submission of Philip the Arab.⁷⁵ Compared with his other, more elaborate reliefs, this one lacks the slain Roman emperor underhoof and an operatic cast of nobles and subjects from across his empire.⁷⁶ Unlike other sites such as Bishapur, where the king projected his visual propaganda to a wider audience and whose images and interests often appeared therein, the reliefs of both Ardashir I and Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam are simplified, with the major elements reduced to the commemoration of royal deeds and identities. Paralleling this, Shapur I's inscription takes care to instruct his successors on the benefits of piety, an important concern of the reliefs as well:



Fig. 17. Reverse of a silver drachm of Ardashir showing a fire altar supported by an Achaemenid-inspired, lion-legged throne, diam. 25 mm, wt. 4.55 g (Göbl SN 3.1.2) (courtesy T.K. Mallon-McCorgray).

⁷⁴Pfeiler 1973; Shahbazi 2001, 66; Alram 2008, 18–22.

⁷⁵This refers to the claims of the king of kings that Philip was forced to sue for peace, and, as part of the agreement, pay a lump sum of 500,000 denarii on the spot and a large annual indemnity (Rubin 1998, 178). In my opinion, MacDermot's (1954) argument for identifying these emperors is still the most convincing. For a recent alternative view, see Overlaet 2009.

⁷⁶The king of kings executed triumphal rock reliefs with similar compositions and ideas at several other sites, including Bishapur II and III and, to a lesser extent, Darabgerd.

These reliefs include numerous subordinate figures such as Roman captives, members of Shapur's court, or other subject peoples. The image of the king of kings triumphing over defeated Roman emperors became the standard, official image of Shapur I and was repeated in a wide variety of media. In addition to rock reliefs, the idea appears in a cameo gemstone portraying an equestrian duel between Shapur and Valerian as well as in Sasanian coinage: the reverse of a specially issued gold double dinar portrays the king of kings holding Valerian captive (Alram et al. 2007; Canepa 2009, 68–71).



Fig. 18. Rock relief of Shapur I holding Valerian captive and receiving the submission of Philip the Arab, from Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief 6).

Now just as we now are conscientious in the concerns and cult of the gods, and are the creature [*dastgerd*] of the gods, and just as we, with the help of the gods sought out and conquered these lands, and did things of fame and daring, so let him too who shall be ruler after us be conscientious in the concerns and cult of the gods, so that the gods may make him their creature [*dastgerd*] too.⁷⁷

Epigraphic and Ritual Alterations of the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht

Shapur I introduced a complex alteration to the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht, the most prestigious structure at the site (fig. 19).⁷⁸ Darius I originally constructed the

Ka'ba-ye Zardosht in careful imitation of a tower built by Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, known as the Zendan-e Solayman.⁷⁹ The ashlar masonry tower, whose faces measure 12.60 m high by 7.25 m wide, rests on a triple-stone plinth. It gives the impression of having three stories, but the lower half of the tower is solid, while the upper half accommodates a single room 5.58 m high and 3.70 m wide.⁸⁰ An imposing flight of steps on the north of the structure, now partially destroyed, led to its elevated cella. Although theories abound, the original Achaemenid function of the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht is unknown.⁸¹ Excavations in the vicinity of

⁷⁷ ŠKZ 51. For summary of the scholarship on the word *dastgerd* informing my translation, see Gignoux 1994.

⁷⁸ For a foundational study on the architecture of the structures, see Stronach 1967.

⁷⁹ Nylander (1966) concluded that the Zendan was constructed before the Ka'ba, since the Ka'ba made use of iron clamps to join its blocks and the Zendan did not. The Zendan was likely built during the same period as the palaces of Pasargadae (ca. 540 B.C.E.), and the Ka'ba, during the reign of Darius I, sometime after 520 B.C.E. (Gropp 2004).

⁸⁰ Stronach 1967, 287–88; Schmidt 1970, 34–49. As discussed above, the reverses of most of the Fratarakid coins portray coffered towers that appear strikingly similar to the

profile of the Ka'ba (Stronach 1966, 226; Boyce 1989, 8; Potts 2007).

⁸¹ Numerous scholars, from the 19th-century explorer Ker Porter to Schmidt, have suggested the towers served the Achaemenids as fire altars or fire temples (theories reviewed in Schippmann 1971a, 194–95; Potts 2007, 282–85). Several scholars, including Herzfeld (1908), Demandt (1968), and Boyce (1975, 457–58), have argued that the Zendan and Ka'ba were tombs. Frye (1974, 386) and Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1983) viewed the towers as treasuries for royal paraphernalia or as “coronation towers.” For an architectural study of the towers, comparing them with other structures in the ancient Near East, see Stronach 1967. For useful reviews of the

Naqsh-e Rostam have revealed an early royal pavilion constructed about 500 m from the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht, recalling Pasargadae.⁸² This could indicate that the towers at Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargadae hosted activities that the king of kings could publicly view, either from a distance or in short procession from these palaces or pavilions.

Whatever their exact function, it is clear that the Ka'ba and Zendan were uniquely important for the Achaemenids. The towers enjoyed a certain prestige in Pars after the Achaemenids' fall, as indicated by the Fratarakid coins that portray an attendant venerating a tower, often with a divine symbol hovering overhead.⁸³ The area around the tower at Naqsh-e Rostam, in particular, shows signs of building and refurbishment through the Hellenistic era. Schmidt's test trenches revealed a dense concentration of building around Ka'ba-ye Zardosht, which he dated variously to the Achaemenid, Hellenistic, and Sasanian eras.⁸⁴ I believe that Potts succeeded in proving that towers are depicted on the Fratarakid coinage; however, without some sort of external corroboration, we can do little more than speculate about the towers' function under the Fratarakids. A fire altar, fire temple, a receptacle for a dormant sacred fire, a treasury, and a tomb have all been argued for the Fratarakid period as for the preceding and succeeding periods.⁸⁵ While they did not necessarily retain their original Achaemenid function, this suggests that the towers inspired some sort of reverence, and perhaps even cult activity, during the Seleucid era and beyond.

Whether he drew from its earlier significance or completely reinvented it, Shapur I made the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht the centerpiece of his newly refashioned site of memory. Shapur I carved a monumental trilingual inscription on the lower portion of the east, west, and south faces of the tower.⁸⁶ The inscription commemorates the king of kings' lineage, empire, and deeds and founds an elaborate ritual protocol. Like Darius I's Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian inscription nearby on his tomb, the trilingual inscription itself was an inherently imperial and powerful statement in the ancient Near Eastern and Iranian worlds. Even if a viewer was



Fig. 19. Ka'ba-ye Zardosht, Naqsh-e Rostam. View of the north face with stairs and east face with the Middle Persian inscriptions of Shapur I and Kerdīr on the lower masonry courses.

illiterate, or simply not allowed to draw close enough to the structure to read it, the mere presence of the inscription on this prestigious structure would have been a powerful visual statement. Shapur I's inscription was in Middle Persian, Parthian, and Greek. The latter two languages were those of his defeated enemies and had the power to carry his message to the East and West. Unlike Darius I's inscription high up on the rock face, that of Shapur I would have been easily legible and thus expected to do more than merely impress from a distance. A visitor would also occasionally experience these inscriptions aurally; those who read

literature and the various interpretations of the structure, see Gropp 2004; Potts 2007.

⁸² Tilia 1974.

⁸³ Choksy 1990a, 1990b; Potts 2007, 296–97.

⁸⁴ As he and others have observed, the remainder of largely unexcavated soil around Naqsh-e Rostam will provide the best evidence as to what occurred there for the Sasanian period as well as the Achaemenid era. Any attempts to defend one single interpretation should be reserved until the area has been

fully excavated, even though the present generation might not live to witness it (Stronach 1967; Schmidt 1970, 53–8, fig. 23).

⁸⁵ See Potts (2007) for an overview of the early literature. It should be noted that the Fratarakid coins do not attempt to portray fire emanating from the towers' crenellations, within the structure, or anywhere else nearby.

⁸⁶ The Middle Persian version is on the east wall, with the Parthian on the west and the Greek on the south.

such inscriptions were expected to read them aloud, effectively re-enlivening them and the king's memory at every recitation.⁸⁷

The first portion of the inscription proclaims Shapur I's royal genealogy, the extent of his empire, and his conquests.⁸⁸ This section corresponds closely to the major themes of the king of kings' rock reliefs and reflects a centrally planned propaganda campaign. Similar in strategy to the Persepolis graffiti and the monumental rock reliefs, the mere presence of Shapur I's inscription boldly claimed the structure for the king and dynasty. Their content, however, goes quite a bit further, echoing the general order and even phraseology of the Achaemenids' Old Persian inscriptions. The Middle Persian inscriptions closely follow their Old Persian predecessors not just in structure but with successions of close thematic and lexical correspondences, ranging from the titles and descent of the king to the relative importance of his provinces to the methods by which he creates and holds his empire.⁸⁹

The linguistic and thematic parallels between Shapur's Ka'ba-ye Zardosht inscription and Darius I's inscription on his tomb are startlingly similar, especially considering the seven centuries that separate them.⁹⁰ In fact, they are so close that positing some sort of lineal connection between the two, either through oral tradition or epic poetry, makes much more sense than arguing that they arose completely at random.⁹¹ Much like their reuse of Achaemenid visual and architectural material, the incredible linguistic and ritual parallels between the content of the inscriptions of Shapur I and the Achaemenids suggest that the Sasanians valued and drew on a deep cultural well of Persian traditions, even if they did not fully understand the exact history of their ultimate source.⁹² While Shapur I's lineage and deeds were fresh in the memory of his court and people, ancient Persian cultural precursors inspired the language in which he celebrated them.

The final two-fifths of Shapur I's Ka'ba-ye Zardosht inscription describes a complex ritual protocol. Shapur I founded five sacred fires (*ādur*) and established elaborate daily rituals based on them that celebrated his immediate family, ancestors, and court.⁹³ According to the inscription, the five fires were maintained for the benefit of the "soul and memory" (Middle Persian *pad amā ruwān ud pannām*) of Shapur himself, his queen of queens, and three of his sons.⁹⁴ Every day, a sheep and a portion of bread and wine were to be offered for the benefit of the soul of each. The inscription lists his ancestors, including Sasan, Papag, and Ardashir, as well as other less-prominent members of his family. It then commemorates his vast court hierarchy, from the chief scribe and priest down to minor bureaucrats and the court jail warden, microcosmically replicating the court hierarchy in ritual terms. Not only did Shapur I physically anchor this newly founded protocol on the Achaemenid tower, but he constructed the ritual itself with inspiration from ancient Persian royal traditions. Much like the Achaemenid-inspired language of the inscription, the Sasanian protocol calling for sheep, bread, and wine has a remarkably close ancient counterpart. Elamite tablets from the Persepolis Fortification Archive refer to the funerary monuments (*šumar*) of the Achaemenid kings and the cult rendered at them for the benefit of the king's soul, including rations for the upkeep of the officials in charge and animals for sacrifice at the tombs.⁹⁵ Paralleling this primary source material, Arrian reports that within the precincts of Cyrus' tomb, "there was a small house created for the Magi who cared for Cyrus' tomb since the time of Cyrus' son, Cambyses, and who received the stewardship from father to son. Every day they were given by the king a sheep, fine white flour, wine and, each month, a horse, to sacrifice for Cyrus."⁹⁶ I would argue that these Elamite texts not only corroborate Arrian's report but, more importantly, provide yet another piece of primary source evidence that proves the

⁸⁷ Kerdir's inscription (KKZ), which the high priest carved on the Ka'ba, under Shapur I's Middle Persian inscription, asks that, "whoever [*may see*] this [*memorial and*] read it out, [*let*] him be more confident in his own [*soul?*] about [*this worship and*] rites" (KKZ 21) (MacKenzie 1999, MR 251 [emphasis and underlining original]).

⁸⁸ Skjaervø 1985, 593–96.

⁸⁹ Skjaervø 1985, 593–98.

⁹⁰ Skjaervø 1985, 603.

⁹¹ Skjaervø 1985, 603. Further parallels manifest between Darius I's inscriptions and many of Ardashir I's statements stemming from later Pahlavi literature (Shahbazi 2001, 66–8). For orality in Sasanian culture general, see Huyse 2008. On the continuity and change in the concept of Iran, see Shah-

bazi 2005b.

⁹² Evocatively laid forth in Skjaervø 1985.

⁹³ ŠKZ 33–50.

⁹⁴ ŠKZ 33–4. See Huyse's commentary (1999, 106) for the tradition of founding fires "for the sake of the soul" in later Zoroastrianism.

⁹⁵ For studies of primary sources attesting to the institution of the royal tombs, cult, and their caretakers in Achaemenid times, see Henkelman 2003; 2008, 287–91, 429–32, 546; Tuplin 2008; Canepa 2010b.

⁹⁶ Arr. *Anab.* 6.29.7–8; cf. Strabo 15.3–7. Food offerings were, and continue to be, an important part of the Zoroastrian *staomi* ritual carried out for the spiritual benefit of souls, living and deceased (Kotwal and Choksy 2004).

Sasanian technologies of memory were deeply rooted in Achaemenid practices.

All available evidence suggests that Shapur I established these fires somewhere within the precincts of Naqsh-e Rostam, thus using both an ancient site and archaizing rituals to give his new creation the weight of antiquity. After Shapur I's death and during the reign of Bahram II (276–293), the empire's high priest, Kerdir, carved a Middle Persian inscription of his own on the Ka'ba located directly below the Middle Persian version of Shapur I's inscription. Kerdir also carved an abbreviated version on the cliff face, adjacent to Shapur I's rock relief.⁹⁷ In both inscriptions,⁹⁸ Kerdir proudly proclaims that Shapur I bequeathed to him control of the “fires and rituals” (*ādur ud kerdagān*) established in the king of kings' inscription and even goes so far as to quote Shapur I's bequest:⁹⁹

ud ēn ādur ud kerdagān čē pad nibišt, ān-im ōh-gōnagdar Šābuhr šāhān šāh pad wāspuhragān pāymār kunēd, kū-t bun-xānag ēn ēw bawēd, ud čiyōn dānē kū kerd yazadān ud amā weh, owōn kun.

And he, Shapur, the king of kings, assigned to me these fires and rituals in the inscription in this way: “Let this be your property, and as you know this ritual protocol for the gods and for us is good, act accordingly.”

Few phrases in the Sasanian inscriptions have received such scrutiny as the phrase *bun-xānag*. I follow Skjaervø and Huyse's translation of the term as “property” or “estate” and, along with Shaki, their understanding that the phrase refers to the site of Naqsh-e Rostam, rather than the Ka'ba itself.¹⁰⁰ Kerdir left another copy of his long Ka'ba-ye Zardosht inscription at a separate site in Pars called Sar Mashhad, as well as an additional short inscription at a site called Naqsh-e Rajab, located only about 2.75 km from Naqsh-e Rostam. The inscriptions share roughly the same content, and Sar Mashhad replicates the text on the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht almost verbatim. However, only the two inscriptions carved at the site of Naqsh-e Rostam contain

the lines that refer to Shapur I's inscription (*nibišt*), the fires and rituals, and the king of kings' bequest. This suggests that Kerdir was eager to showcase what Shapur I had entrusted to him. In using *bun-xānag*, a phrase that Zoroastrian law used regularly in transactions transferring the ownership of a fire temple, and the demonstrative pronoun, Kerdir deictically refers to Naqsh-e Rostam as the site of these “fires and rituals,” founded by Shapur I.¹⁰¹

The buildings discovered in Schmidt's west test trench yielded neither normal domestic material nor military equipment, suggesting they served some other, less utilitarian function.¹⁰² The 3.50 x 5.80 m room that Schmidt excavated in Building I contained rectangular niches, 73 cm wide x 53–56 cm high and 26–30 cm deep, located about 1.10 m from the ground and set into the center of the west and east walls, and into the western section of the north wall.¹⁰³ Though destroyed, Schmidt speculated that niches covered the south wall as well. Building II contained two connected rooms, both of which were provided with single niches of roughly similar size and height from the ground.¹⁰⁴ Their exact function is unknown. It is quite possible that the building served as a library or archive, although some sort of auxiliary cultic function cannot be dismissed.¹⁰⁵ Remnants of the decorative treatments on the structures suggest that the Sasanians covered their new creations in Achaemenid ornamental features reinterpreted in new mediums, as at Ardashir-Xwarrah. Plaster covered in a gray wash, similar in color to the Persepolis treasury walls, covered the mudbrick buildings clustered around the Ka'ba, and some were decorated with stucco inspired by Achaemenid architecture.¹⁰⁶

The exact role that the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht played in Shapur's ritual protocol is uncertain and should remain open until new evidence emerges, as should the function of the post-Achaemenid buildings surrounding the Ka'ba. Until that time, a number of general observations are possible. The very presence of the inscribed record (*nibišt*) of the foundation of

⁹⁷ KNRm (Huyse 1998, 112).

⁹⁸ KKZ 2–3; KNRm 6–7.

⁹⁹ KKZ 3.

¹⁰⁰ Shaki 1974; Skjaervø 1989, 1993. For a review of the literature, see Huyse 1998, 110–16.

¹⁰¹ “ce passage montre que c'est une expression technique justement employée lors de la transmission de la direction des temples du Feu. . . . C'est la même opération entre Šāpuhr et Kerdīr qui est décrite dans l'inscription” (Humbach 1974, 204). Similar phrases occur in Bactrian contracts documenting the sale of secular property (Huyse 1998, 116 n. 41).

¹⁰² Schmidt 1970, 57.

¹⁰³ Schmidt 1970, 54.

¹⁰⁴ The north room measured 4.7 x 3.0 m and had at least one niche per wall, 85 cm from the ground, measuring 60–70 cm wide x 50 cm high x 25–30 cm deep. The south room, measuring 2.98 x 1.80 m, had a single niche 80 cm from the ground in the west and east walls and two niches in the south wall. They measured 50–62 cm wide x 45–50 cm high x 25–30 cm deep (Schmidt 1970, 54).

¹⁰⁵ While they likely did not house altars or cult statues, without knowing the nature of the rest of the site, I believe their function should be held open (Huyse 1998, 115–16).

¹⁰⁶ Schmidt 1970, 54–8, 75, fig. 30, no. 23; Kröger 1982, 196–97.

the cult and its transfer to Kerdir conveys the Ka'ba's general prestige and, at least indirect, connection with cult.¹⁰⁷ Unless evidence of cult furniture or a larger fire temple is discovered, one should not dismiss out of hand the possibility that these ritual activities took place on or around the Ka'ba.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, any subsidiary functions that the tower might have served must remain open until new evidence emerges. Much like the Achaemenid and Fratarakid periods, the three functions that have often been put forward for the Sasanian era are a tomb, treasury, and religious structure.¹⁰⁹ Although a treasury cannot be discounted, there is no evidence to support Henning's specific interpretation of the Ka'ba as a treasury containing a master copy of the Avesta.¹¹⁰ The fact that the interior of the Ka'ba presents an unventilated space suggests that it would be difficult to contain a sacred fire inside it. Of the more likely suggestions, it has been argued—but cannot be proved—that Shapur reused the Ka'ba as his tomb.¹¹¹ Such a close, fused, cultic-monumental-funerary function would cohere quite well with Achaemenid funerary practices revealed in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets as well as the overall pattern of Sasanian-Achaemenid correspondences that Shapur I's activities at the site present.¹¹² Even if Shapur I's bones were interred elsewhere at the site or a different site entirely, his visual, inscriptional, and ritual legacy ensured that the Ka'ba could at least serve as a cenotaph. With luck, the unexcavated portions of Naqsh-e Rostam will provide additional information at some point in the future.

Bishapur

During roughly the same period Shapur I remade Naqsh-e Rostam into a dynastic sanctuary, he founded the city of Bishapur, located only 300 km to the west of Ardashir-Xwarrah.¹¹³ The excavated remains of the city demonstrate how the technologies of memory estab-

lished at Ardashir-Xwarrah and Staxr inspired Shapur I's own creations. In just one generation, the memorial practices that Ardashir instituted became an integral part of Sasanian city building: although only a small portion of the city has been excavated, Bishapur evinces a use of Achaemenid architectural forms on certain prestigious and innovative structures. Like the Takht-e Neshin and palaces in Ardashir-Xwarrah, several structures in Bishapur carried architectural ornament that deliberately appropriated Achaemenid visual culture. Rather than transporting ancient architectural members or translating them into the more ephemeral medium of stucco, however, at Bishapur, contemporary stonemasons translated into local stone those Achaemenid architectural forms that had emerged as the most privileged in third-century Sasanian reuse.¹¹⁴ An "Achaemenidizing" cornice, for example, marks the main entranceway into the grand chamber of the subterranean "Anahid" temple, and the colossal bull protomes there hearken to Persepolitan bull capitals (figs. 20–2).¹¹⁵

Shapur I combined these older traditions with experimentation in imaging his expanding Sasanian ideology of kingship. In this city, he used captives and select artistic techniques from Antioch in memory of his western triumphs.¹¹⁶ The "Achaemenidizing" cornices are set atop doorframes that derive from classical molding, and Shapur's rock reliefs show a unique blending of Roman and Persepolitan motifs. This presents the very likely scenario of Roman craftsmen contributing to rock reliefs inspired from careful, on-site study of Persepolis.¹¹⁷ Much like Ardashir-Xwarrah, rock reliefs mark the cliff face of a nearby gorge to envelop the site within a wider topography of memory. The river valley to the east of the city, the Tange-e Chowgan, hosts three separate rock reliefs celebrating Shapur I's victories over the Romans and numerous other peoples.¹¹⁸ In a cave high above the river, Shapur

¹⁰⁷ ŠKZ 33.1.

¹⁰⁸ The medieval *staomi* ritual was carried out in an open-air setting, in the outer precinct of a fire temple (Kotwal and Choksy 2004, 389–90).

¹⁰⁹ Trümpelmann 1992, 31–41; Gropp 2004; Potts 2007, 289–91.

¹¹⁰ Henning 1939; 1957, i.

¹¹¹ Trümpelmann 1992, 42–3.

¹¹² Henkelman 2003; 2008, 287–91, 429–32, 546; Tuplin 2008; Canepa 2010 (review). The ritual celebration of the fires coheres well with the funerary (though not mortuary) function of the site, which would be carried out elsewhere (Huff 2004, 595–96). Any objection that Zoroastrians would not allow the coexistence of sacred fires and royal human remains is anachronistic and ignores the weight of evidence at this and other ancient sites, as well as the Sasanians' own less-

than-orthodox royal ideology and cult (Daryaei 2008).

¹¹³ Main excavation reports are Ghirshman 1956, 1971; Sarfaraz 1348/1969, 1970, 1974, 1975, 1976; Yasi 1971; Azarnoush 1987. For rock reliefs, see Herrmann 1980, 1981; Vanden Berghe 1983, 72–5, 81, 88. With other related bibliography, see Keal 1990; Canepa 2009, 55–78.

¹¹⁴ The "lotus-petal lintel" (or the "cavetto cornice") and the bull protome capital, not much discussed by Ghirshman after his initial report (Salles and Ghirshman 1936).

¹¹⁵ Salles and Ghirshman 1936, 119–20.

¹¹⁶ On Roman sculptural, masonry, and mosaic techniques in his new city and Antioch, which the king of kings repeatedly sacked, see Canepa 2009, 43, 54, 174, 244 n. 119, 258 n. 18.

¹¹⁷ Canepa 2009, 67, 72–3.

¹¹⁸ Supra n. 113.



Fig. 20. Achaemenid-inspired cavetto cornice from the Anahid temple, Bishapur.

I created an 8 m tall statue in the round placed near the cave's entrance. The cave walls show preparations for the addition of bas-relief carvings, evidently left unfinished. Whether this site was Shapur's final resting place, as some have argued, at the very least it would have provided another truly monumental focus for cult surrounding his memory.¹¹⁹

THE IMPACT AND LEGACY OF ARDASHIR I'S AND SHAPUR I'S TECHNOLOGIES OF MEMORY

Ardashir I and Shapur I established precedents that heavily influenced the next century and a half of Sasanian memory practices. Their successors inherited from them both an experience of Achaemenid and Sasanian monuments and visual traditions as thoroughly fused and a wider Persian topography of memory inflected by rock reliefs and grand cities. Re-



Fig. 21. Fragmentary Achaemenid-inspired bull protome from the Anahid temple, Bishapur.



Fig. 22. Bull protome capital, Persepolis.

sponding to their examples, later sovereigns carved reliefs and inscriptions at some of the same venerable sites in the vicinity of Staxr, including Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis as well as at an increasing variety of new sites throughout Pars and the empire.¹²⁰ In the

¹¹⁹ Ghirshman 1962, 162–65; 1971, 179–85.

¹²⁰ Of their successors, Bahram II (276–283) was the most prolific patron, carving at least six and as many as eight reliefs

(Weber 2009, 597–624). Vanden Berghe (1983, 76–82) attributed as many as 10 reliefs to this king; see also Shahbazi 1989.

following century and a half, at least four other kings and the cleric, Kerdir, carved an additional six reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam.¹²¹ At this point, succeeding reliefs responded ever more intimately to the earlier reliefs at the site. Later patrons became increasingly sensitive to the placement, shape, and even composition of the earlier reliefs, be they Sasanian, Achaemenid, or Elamite, forging visual interactions across centuries or even millennia. The high priest Kerdir, who owed the start of his career to Shapur I, integrated his relief into that of king of kings. The relief is a bust image of Kerdir carved to the right of Shapur I's main relief, portraying the priest raising his hand in a gesture of respect directed at the king (fig. 23). In addition to referring directly to Shapur I's inscription, Kerdir's inscription on the exterior of the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht physically and visually responded to Shapur I's treatment of the structure itself.¹²² Kerdir carved a mirror image of this relief at Naqsh-e Rajab, with his gesture of respect meaningfully interacting with the older reliefs of the kings of kings nearby. Kerdir was portrayed as a courtier in a number of Bahram II's reliefs, including those at Naqsh-e Rostam, Sarab (or Naqsh)-e Bahram, and Sar Mashhad (the site of another of his inscriptions, added later).¹²³ His additions to Naqsh-e Rajab and Shapur I's monuments at Naqsh-e Rostam all seem to be focused on providing the visual impression that he was as closely connected to the great Shapur as he was to Bahram II, although the text of his inscriptions carefully lists his titles under succeeding kings.

At Naqsh-e Rostam, Bahram II incorporated the remains of one of the Elamite reliefs into a scene depicting his family and courtiers paying him homage (fig. 24). Although it differed stylistically from the Achaemenid reliefs on the cliff nearby, it is possible that Bahram II valued this ancient relief as a remnant of his ancient Persian "ancestors" (fig. 25). In this case, Bahram II's relief compelled the ancient figure to perform compositionally and ritually in his contemporary courtly scene: the remaining Elamite figure starts the line of courtiers turned toward the king at the center, with all Sasanian figures following his profile composition. A double joust scene, tentatively attributed to Bahram II, lines up directly under an Achaemenid tomb, extending the long, vertical arm of its cruciform shape (fig. 26).¹²⁴ Similarly, Hormozd



Fig. 23. Rock relief of Kerdir at Naqsh-e Rostam (added to Relief 6). Kerdir's inscription (KNRm) is located below the relief.



Fig. 24. Rock relief of Bahram II from Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief 2). Remains of the Elamite relief are on the right (see fig. 25).

II (302–309 C.E.) carved a joust scene directly below the tomb attributed to Artaxerxes I, and another king began, but did not finish, an enthronement scene

¹²¹ Other than Naqsh-e Rostam 5 (Hormozd II), there is no solid consensus on the attribution of the "joust" scenes (Herrmann and Curtis 2002). Relief 7 is tentatively attributed to Bahram II (Vanden Berghe 1983, 77; Haerinck and Overlaet 2009, 532–33).

¹²² Gignoux 1991; MacKenzie 1999, MR 219.

¹²³ See Weber (2009) for his inclusion in Bahram II's reliefs.

¹²⁴ von Gall (1990, 30–6) argued that the patron of this relief was Bahram IV (388–399). His intricately argued yet idiosyncratic attributions, including the great *ayvān* at Taq-e Bostan, have not been widely accepted.



Fig. 25. Detail, rock relief of Bahram II incorporating the remains of the Elamite relief, Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief 2).

above that of Hormozd II.¹²⁵ Narseh (293–302 C.E.) situated his investiture relief on a broad face below and in between the tomb of Darius I and the one attributed to Xerxes I.¹²⁶ Depicted clearly on the relief, the repeating concave shapes seen on the Achaemenid “cavetto cornice” embellish Narseh’s and Anahid’s crowns, indicating that this ancient ornamental motif was worthy enough to serve as the symbol of the king and his divine patroness (fig. 27).¹²⁷

At this point, it is questionable what drew patrons to the site—the Achaemenid remains or Ardashir I’s and, especially, Shapur I’s reinterpretation of it. At the end of the empire, the site presented a coherent fusion of the two dynasties’ visual culture, architecture, and ritual: in a sense, blurring them completely. The Achaemenid royal tombs, possibly reused by the



Fig. 26. Double rock relief of equestrian combat, attributed tentatively to Bahram II (Relief 7, *below*), and the Achaemenid tomb of Darius I (*above*), from Naqsh-e Rostam.

Sasanians, and the numerous rock-cut and freestanding *astōdāns* that cluster around the site, indicate that Naqsh-e Rostam’s primary, though not only, significance was funerary.¹²⁸ A close connection between funerary monuments, a cult devoted to the memory

¹²⁵ For Hormozd II, see Herrmann and Howell 1977. Vanden Berghe (1983) attributes the unfinished relief to Shapur II. Another joust scene (Relief 3) is situated below the tomb attributed to Darius II. There is even less consensus on its patron; it has been attributed to Hormozd I (Trümpelmann 1992), Shapur II (Schmidt 1970), Bahram II (Vanden Berghe 1983), or to sometime in the fifth century (von Gall 1990).

¹²⁶ An unfinished relief was prepared to the east of Narseh’s. Some assume this was the work of Narseh, though given its size, it could also be the work of Khosrow II, who left many other colossal unfinished reliefs at some of the most prominent sites in the empire, such as at the Terash-e Farhad near

Bisotun (Luschey 1996) and the great *ayvān* at Taq-e Bostan (Movassat 2005).

¹²⁷ Vanden Berghe 1983, 140. This motif appears in the crowns of the colossal creatures in Xerxes I’s “Gate of Nations” at Persepolis.

¹²⁸ An *astōdān* (Middle Persian) is a Zoroastrian ossuary meant to contain the bones of the deceased and prevent human remains from coming into contact with the elements (Schippmann 1971b; Trümpelmann 1992, 42–5). For important studies on Iranian mortuary techniques, see Shahbazi 1987; Huff 2004.



Fig. 27. Detail of the crowns of Narseh and Anahid from Naqsh-e Rostam (Relief 8).

of the dynasty, and reliefs that dealt with contemporary concerns of the kings of kings suggest that the site presented different significances to kings of kings depending on the point in their life and reign.¹²⁹

Largely destroyed now, Narseh's late third-century monument at Paikuli reflects the later prestige of Shapur I's refashioned Ka'ba-ye Zardosht (fig. 28).¹³⁰ According to his inscription, Narseh created the structure on the very site where he was met and acclaimed king of kings by representatives of the leading dignitaries and families of the empire.¹³¹ This site, a mountain pass on one of the main routes that connected the capital, Ctesiphon, with the Iranian plateau, had no previous large-scale settlement. In a sense, Narseh applied whole-scale the techniques that had developed through experimentation by his predecessors in Pars, creating a sort of condensed version of Naqsh-e Rostam. Because of its damaged state, we cannot know the exact features of the monument; yet it appears to have been some sort of rectangular tower with portrait busts of the king incorporated into it.

Shapur I's refashioning of the Ka'ba-ye Zardosht very likely inspired the idea that a tower bearing royal inscriptions, with closely associated images of the king, would be a fitting royal monument, although the purpose for which Narseh created his was somewhat different. Narseh's goal was to legitimate and commemorate his accession, even going so far as to record verbatim the speeches and letters involved in what really was a usurpation, whereas Shapur I's was to commemorate his deeds and found a cult of memory.¹³² Whether the monument was intended to share any of the Ka'ba's other functions, such as tomb or fire temple, is as unprovable as that of the Ka'ba without further external evidence. Common sense would suggest that the king might be loath to expose his bones to possible disruption and abuse in a place so far from central control, so if funerary, it would be a cenotaph.

Yet another Sasanian tower, that of Dum-e Mil near Nurabad, was built in the vicinity of Shapur's foundation of Bishapur.¹³³ Similar to Narseh's monument, it occupies an elevated area away from human settle-

¹²⁹ E.g., Bahram II carved at least two reliefs at the site, which stem from different points in his reign and deal with different issues.

¹³⁰ Discovered in 1843 by H. Rawlinson and surveyed by E. Herzfeld in 1924, its inscriptions were published by Humbach and Skjaervø (1978–1983). The site has recently been re-explored by an Italian-Kurdish team led by C. Cereti (Faticoni 2006).

¹³¹ Paikuli 3.2, 3.8, 3.12 (Humbach and Skjaervø 1978–1983).

¹³² Paikuli 3.2, 3.13 (Humbach and Skjaervø 1978–1983).

¹³³ Trümpelmann 1992, 47–8. Originally understood by Ghirshman (1944–1945, 184) to be a Fratarakid construction from the third to first centuries B.C.E., Huff (1975) proved it to be Sasanian because of its masonry techniques.

ment on a thoroughfare. With a stairway leading to an upper entrance, the design of the tower reflects the Achaemenid towers at Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargadae, and, more importantly, the prestige, if not the later reinterpretation of these architectural forms under the early Sasanians. No matter if it functioned as an ossuary, fire altar, or some other sacred structure, the tower hints again at the wider influence that Shapur I's activities at Naqsh-e Rostam exerted over later Sasanian monumental practices.

Ardashir-Xwarrah did not receive much attention from later sovereigns. By contrast, the accumulated efforts of succeeding kings of kings converted Bishapur into a dynastic site of memory, performing for southwestern Pars what the sites surrounding Staxr did for the center of the province. Three succeeding Sasanian kings—Bahram I, Bahram II, and Shapur II—responded to Shapur I's memorial zone at Bishapur and carved their own rock reliefs in Tang-e Chogan.¹³⁴ In the sixth or seventh century, Bishapur's palatial structures were remodeled to create a colonnaded court and *ayvān* with architectural and ornamental features similar to contemporary structures at Takht-e Solayman and Ctesiphon.¹³⁵ This indicates that while Bishapur's architecture might have become outmoded for contemporary court ceremony and tastes, the site itself remained significant and in use. Although not all succeeded in establishing cities that rivaled Bishapur, Sasanian kings continued to found new cities in the tradition of Ardashir I's and Shapur I's monumental zones in central Pars. City foundations named after deeds or royal titles became a paramount memory practice for the strongest sovereigns.¹³⁶ Although they often scarcely outlived their founders, in their patron's eyes, the cities would persist as constant monuments to their deeds and identities.

Like Naqsh-e Rostam, Persepolis remained important for the Sasanian dynasty by providing a sense of its past well into the third century. Two precious inscriptions left in the palace of Darius I (the *tačara*) indicate that members of the dynasty who lived on the far fringes of the empire still sought a meaningful connection with their Achaemenid/Kayanid "ancestors" through the ruins at the site (fig. 29). After paying homage to Shapur II, the king of kings, in Staxr in 311, the patron,

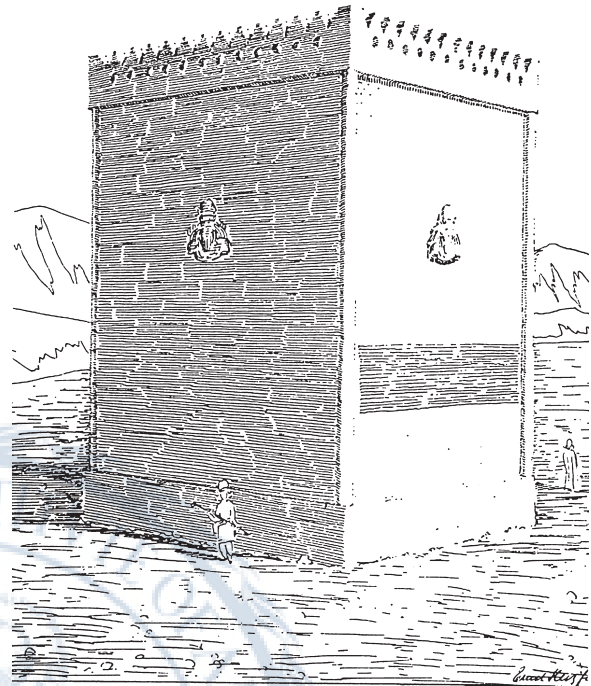


Fig. 28. Reconstruction of Narseh's Paikuli monument (Herzfeld 1914, fig. 1).

another Shapur, who had been appointed King of the Sakas, visited Persepolis specifically to perform sacred rituals in honor of his ancestors and the creator of the structure. According to the inscription:

He arrived in [Persepolis], and had wine near this building. He caused great rejoicing and ordered rites performed for the gods. He blessed his father and grandfather. He blessed Shapur [II], the king of kings, blessed himself and those who built this structure. May God remember [them].¹³⁷

In this smaller-scale yet enduring addition to the ancient palace, Shapur, King of the Sakas, ritually and epigraphically altered the site, fusing his identity to it. This ritual, which blesses the souls of his family and unnamed ancient ancestors conducted in con-

¹³⁴ Canepa (forthcoming).

¹³⁵ Ghirshman 1956, plan 2 (Room D). It should be noted that the third-century mosaics were not the original floor of this late Sasanian structure (the "triple *ayvān* with mosaics") but of a building that was destroyed in this remodeling. Ghirshman's (1971, 21–5) plans and nomenclature can easily be misleading, but his description is quite clear; see also Keal 1990, 288.

¹³⁶ With supplementary evidence from secondary and tertiary sources, seals provide us with the most solid primary sources on the names of these foundations (Gyselen 1989, 2001).

¹³⁷ Translation drawn from Frye and Callieri's adaptation of Lukonin (Frye 1966, 85; Lukonin 1969, 129; Shahbazi 1977, 201; Callieri 2003).



Fig. 29. Achaemenid door frame in the *tačara* of Darius I, with cavetto cornice, finished 486 B.C.E. Among other inscriptions on the frame, the Sasanian inscriptions of Shapur, King of the Sakas, and his official, Seleukos (311 C.E. and 329 C.E., respectively), are located at lower eye-level on the right.

cert with “rites performed for the gods” (referred to, again, as *yazdān kardagān*), microcosmically parallels the grand foundation his grandfather, Shapur I, left at Naqsh-e Rostam. The taking of bread and wine, highly significant acts in and of themselves in Persian culture, ritually collapsed the centuries that divided them. To underscore how important Shapur considered both his act and his memorial, 18 years later, in 329, he ordered a court official, identified as Seleukos, to travel from Sagestan, in the northeast of the empire, to Persepolis to ensure that his memorial was still there. Seleukos commissioned another inscription that carefully records this and commemorates

his master’s deeds and piety.¹³⁸ In the mid fourth century, Pars was still the symbolic core of the empire for members of the dynasty, even for those from the far reaches of the empire.

Ardashir I and Shapur I not only fashioned a new vision of the past but also innovated a repertoire of memory practices that inspired the activities of their successors. The founders of the dynasty used these techniques to reconstitute and reanimate the awe-inspiring, yet half-understood, monumental patrimony of Pars, weaving together old and new sites, rituals, and images, as well as creating vital new sites of memory such as Ardashir-Xwarrah and Bishapur. The rich topography of memory that the first two kings of kings wrought acted as a focusing lens for their activities and yielded a tangible and powerful experience of their vision of the past where Sasanian, Achaemenid, and Kayanid dynasties were part of a coherent whole.¹³⁹ Just as importantly, their sites and techniques enabled their successors to continually reconnect with this heritage and create new, powerful, and politically useful visions of the past themselves.

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY
338 HELLER HALL
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
271 19TH AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55455-0121
MPCANEPA@UMN.EDU

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¹³⁸ Frye 1966, 87; Callieri 2007, 133–34.

¹³⁹ Smith 1982, 53–5.

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